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ABSTRACT

This book reflects experiences during the first 3 years of an ongoing effort to examine the experiences of newcomer Asian parents as they encounter U.S. public schools. The second phase of the project continues program activities at schools in Chicago (Illinois), Des Moines (Iowa), Minneapolis (Minnesota), and Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), and now includes schools and communities in Richmond (California) and Houston (Texas). The first chapter, "Barriers to Partnerships," documents the many barriers U.S. public schools place in the way of Asian newcomers and their parents. The second chapter, "Community Perspectives," offers profiles of the difficulties immigrant families have experienced in coming to the United States. The third chapter, "Project Site Profiles," details project activities in the four cities previously mentioned and San Diego (California) and Seattle (Washington). The final chapter, "Building Partnerships," explores how schools can welcome and support newcomer parents as they seek quality education for their children. Mutual respect, trust, and understanding are essential in developing effective cooperation between Asian newcomer parents and U.S. schools. Rather than viewing families as deficient, educators should see them as repositories of essential cultural practices. An appendix contains a 94-item bibliography and lists project participants and members of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students. (SLD)

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UNFAMILIAR PARTNERS

ASIAN PARENTS AND U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Report from
the National
Coalition
of Advocates
for Students

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UNFAMILIAR PARTNERS

ASIAN PARENTS AND U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Report from the National Coalition
of Advocates for Students

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Partnership Project

March 1997

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FOREWORD

The National Asian Family/School Partnership Project (NAFSPP) confronted NCAS with one of its greatest program challenges to date. No other NCAS national project has presented such a range of languages, cultures, and conflicted homeland histories. The untutored reader might be surprised to encounter such diversity in a book about Asian newcomer families, concluding—as many do—that all Asians share a similar culture. In fact, the Hmong, Thaidam, Vietnamese, Filipino, Lao, and Cambodian families profiled here have come to the U.S. from vastly different backgrounds.

One of the goals of this book is to help schools expand their awareness of the profound differences among Asian newcomers in language, culture, and life experience. The first chapter documents the many barriers U.S. public schools place before Asian newcomer students and parents. The second chapter offers vivid profiles of the hard journeys that immigrant families have made to this land. Chapter 3 details project activities in six communities: Chicago; Philadelphia; San Diego; Des Moines; Minneapolis; and Seattle. The final chapter explores how schools can welcome and support newcomer parents as they seek full access to quality education for their children.

Unfamiliar Partners reflects experiences during the first three years of an ongoing effort to examine the experiences of newcomer Asian parents as they encounter U.S. public schools. The project's second phase continues program activity at schools in Chicago, Des Moines, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia, and now includes schools and communities in Richmond, California and Houston, Texas.

This project's richness of diversity has made a vital contribution to NCAS's work now and in the future by highlighting the experiences of deserving new constituencies, rendering the invisible as visible and transforming the unheard voice into an urgent call. The project's gift to NCAS is the opportunity to know and better understand these new and growing student constituencies. Perhaps this book will forever put to rest the myth of young Asian newcomers as a monolithic "model minority."

Joan First
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

It was July of 1981 when I first arrived in Minneapolis as one of several thousand refugees resettled in that state. I remember how difficult and frightening it was to go to school in a new country and in a totally different education system from my own. Many questions were raised in my mind: *How will my teachers and classmates understand me—and vice versa? How will I be treated in school? Will they accept me?* Fortunately, with personal determination, support from my family, and good programs from my school, I did just fine. School was not difficult when it provided me with the right support and the right tools with which to learn.

In this new land, it was very difficult to feel "at home" when I was not at home, as in the many occasions when my non-Asian American friends invited me into their homes. It was also very difficult for me to believe people who said, "I understand what you've gone through," because their experiences were not remotely close to my own.

This book, therefore, is not about "understanding" or feeling "at home" when you are not. It's about people who understand situations because they have actually experienced them; it's about people who have survived to tell the stories; it's about people who feel at home only when they actually are at home. It's about the Asian American and immigrant experiences in U.S. public schools based on experiences drawn from the national project described below.

In March of 1993, I was fortunate to be given the opportunity by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS) to work on the first national project to focus on education and immigrant Asian families—the National Asian Family /School Partnership Project (NAFSPP). Funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the project has three main goals:

- Identify specific school and community-based strategies that contribute to the success or failure of partnerships between Asian parents, community representatives, and school staff.
- Support the academic success of Asian students in selected communities by providing training, networking assistance, and other resources to families, schools, and community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve Asian families.
- Share successful strategies with families, schools, and community organizations in places where there is an interest in developing stronger ties between Asian families and public schools.

The perspectives throughout the book are drawn from the authentic experiences of Asian Americans and immigrants. We hope this publication will provide a real sense of the issues and challenges facing these communities.

This document is not intended to serve as a road map or a manual. It provides case studies rather than model programs. However, these samples and the lessons learned are important to those committed to equal access to education for all students, particularly those who want to work effectively with Asian-American and immigrant students and their families.

One of the most positive and effective approaches described in the book is the Home/School Partnership. By using CBOs as a link between home and school, we were able to develop a more trusting and comfortable home/school relationship. Asian parents were supported when they wanted to express their concerns about school as well as community issues. As a result, more parents participated in the school's social and educational functions; more parent groups were formally and informally organized to address school issues; CBOs increased their emphasis on education issues; and parents demanded to know more about their rights and the school's responsibilities.

Among the challenges we faced during the project was a profound lack of resources on the part of most of the participating Asian CBOs. With little money, staff, or educational expertise, they were struggling to survive. Many were run by volunteers with regular 9-to-5 jobs. Another challenge was the hard fact that many Asian Americans and immigrants don't feel that they belong in the United States. They feel they are not part of the U.S. community. The school in their community is not their school, it is an American School—and they are not Americans.

Our need is two-fold. Non-Asian American communities must realize that new Asian American communities are as American as they are. At the same time, we must convince Asian American communities that they are as American as anyone else. We must insist that the U.S. education system be inclusive, respect diverse learning styles, and respect the values of all families. Most of all, we must be honest and fair to all students if we expect them to be honest and fair when they grow up.

Each student and each family is equally important to the growth of the United States, regardless of skin color, religious and cultural background, or class. When one Asian American child fails, all Americans have to pay the price. These students are here to stay; they are not going back home. We must take care of all students, not just some of them.

This book represents a collaborative effort of participating Asian-American and immigrant communities and selected public schools in Chicago, Minneapolis, Des Moines, Philadelphia, San Diego, and Seattle, along with NAFSPP project staff, NCAS national staff, and the project's national advisory committee. I wish to thank them all for their tireless commitment to improved education for all children.

Special thanks goes to numerous Asian-American and immigrant families from: the Thaidam community in Des Moines, Iowa; the Cambodian communities in Chicago, Illinois and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Filipino parents in Seattle, Washington; the Hmong community in Minneapolis, Minnesota; the Lao community in San Diego, California; and the Vietnamese community in Chicago, Illinois. Without your active participation and invaluable input, this publication could not exist.

Special thanks also goes to the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund for generously providing financial assistance to the project.

Bouy Te, Director
NCAS National Asian Family/School Partnership Project

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Ten years ago, the National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS) launched the first national study of the experiences of immigrant students and their families in U.S. public schools. Among the findings in the project's final report, *New Voices: Immigrant Students in U.S. Public Schools*, were the distinct needs of parents and school-aged children from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other parts of Asia. Sadly, ten years later, this subsequent study of Asian immigrant groups finds that more barriers exist now to participation in public schools by immigrant and refugee parents.

Ten years may not be a long time in the life of a planet, but it is a long time in the lives of school-age children. For parents from Asia who lived through massive political, social, cultural, and economic changes, ten years is also a long time. Long enough, for example, for dramatic changes to occur in Vietnam during the American military's war against Communism. Long enough for the Pol Pot regime to devastate much of Cambodia.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis of a variety of barriers, issues, and concerns that impede development of positive partnerships between public schools and Asian newcomer families and communities.

FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE DIVERSITY

Cultural diversity within the larger Asian community often confuses or impedes the ability of a school to work effectively with families. When school staff make an effort to engage Asian immigrant families in the education of their children, results may backfire if outreach efforts are based on broad assumptions about all Asians.

As a result of this diversity, definitions of family/school partnerships differ across cultures and communities. "Partnership" is a cultural concept. Schools and parents differ in their definitions of "involvement," "collaboration," and of the roles and functions that parents are to assume in their children's academic lives. A Filipino parent said, "Let us not impose a vision of partnership on Asian communities. We need to allow each community to define partnership."

It is very important for school personnel to understand the background of each child and the role of the extended family in the child's life. It is also important for teachers and administrators to learn the parameters of extended families. Otherwise, school staff may be understandably confused about who has the authority to speak for a child. For example, an Asian immigrant adult may approach a school principal about an issue affecting a certain Asian immigrant student. The principal may assume that the adult has the right to speak for the child's family because of his or her ethnicity. However, no matter how well-intended the adult is, that adult may not have the authority of the family to act on the child's behalf. He or she may speak a different language from the child's family, come from a different culture, or hold different views about what should be done for the child.

LACK OF MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT

For Asian refugee parents in particular, building trust may be hampered by their homeland experiences, the circumstances surrounding their journey to the U.S., and their experiences here.

Adult Asian refugees may be distrustful and fearful of challenging U.S. schools because authorities in their homelands responded to such challenges with harsh measures. War and severe economic deprivation were often primary reasons why families left their homelands. For many refugees, the journey to the U.S. included dangerous border crossings, extensive time spent in refugee camps under difficult circumstances, perilous sea journeys in small crafts often attacked by pirates, and others hardships. Such experiences can engender anxiety, fear, and distrust.

"What do most parents want from school? They want teachers and administrators they can trust, people who seem truly concerned with the growth and welfare of the children, and who are sensitive to the ways children are being brought up in the home," stated a Lao parent in San Diego. Parents need to know that their children are safe at school. Parents insist that the school should be accountable for their children because, once the child gets on the bus, the parent has no way of tracking the child.

Frederick Erickson (1987, p. 344) argued that "it is essential that the teacher and students establish and maintain trust in each other at the edge of risk." However, that may be especially difficult for Asian immigrant families to accomplish. Some parents may feel that the U.S.-initiated conflict in Southeast Asia, then withdrew, leaving their homelands in a state of limbo for decades. Despite ambivalent feelings, the U.S. may still offer the best hope for family reunification, peace, economic gain, and a better future for their children.

Ambivalent feelings on the part of many Southeast Asian refugees have often resulted in trust not being freely given to public school personnel. Instead they must earn it. Establishing trust is undercut by the fact that schools in the United States are structured and organized differently than schools in their homeland, and hold different expectations for students and parents. Additionally, profound differences in language and culture often prevent families from communicating effectively with teachers, guidance counselors, and other school staff.

STRUGGLING WITH A NEW SCHOOL SYSTEM

Parents who were not educated in the United States must rely on their limited knowledge of schools in Asia or the U.S. to navigate the American system for their children.

In the French system of education that dominated the school systems of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, parents were not allowed to intervene in the education of their children. In Laos, for example, prior to 1963, all schools were taught in the French language. Thereafter, all schooling was conducted in the Lao language, but the system remained French. The Hmong, a minority people in Laos with no formal education in their own culture, had no voice in the education of the young. As a Hmong parent in Minneapolis explained, "Hmong parents completely felt their children to be the school's responsibility. Whatever happened to their children would be considered the faults, mistakes, or abuse of the schools. Parents got used to having little involvement in their children's education. All educational aspects are up to the teachers to decide. They have no role for parents in teaching their kids academically. However, parents do teach their kids about family values, morality, and manners. And many Hmong think the educational system in this country is doing the same thing. But they do not dare to ask the teachers. They blame the kids for not studying hard enough and think that is the reason they don't perform well in school." Hmong parents' high expectations of teachers have led many parents to withdraw from American teachers when they fail to meet these expectations.

According to one Cambodian parent, "We always expect the teacher alone to teach the kids. We respect and regard the teachers just like second parents. Therefore, we have no need to teach the kids much because the teachers already teach them. We depend on the teachers to teach." The Cambodian cultural belief is that "good kids" will prosper anywhere without intervention. "In Cambodia, once children were registered in schools, everything was taken care of by the teachers. As parents, brothers, and sisters, we had no right to interfere in the system regarding our children's education," explained one Cambodian father in Chicago.

LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

Issues surrounding different interpretations of "freedom" by parents and children are a primary source of tension within Asian immigrant and refugee families. Children, especially adolescents seeking to distance themselves from parental control, may actively pursue their goal of personal freedom. Asian immigrant parents may respond to this behavior by mocking the child's wish to attain "freedom" and blaming school personnel, who are often seen as catalysts of the problem. Students and parents who participated in the project frequently used the word "freedom" to describe a serious barrier to successful home/school partnerships.

Young people and adults who come to the U.S. from other countries must grow into a mature understanding of the relationship between the "freedom" they seek and the accompanying civic responsibilities. For example, one parent described a situation in which a high school teacher presented a lesson on the concept of freedom of speech. When the son returned home, he began to speak disrespectfully to his parents. When corrected, he explained that his teacher had taught him the right of freedom of speech.

Differing notions of what "freedom" means are the source of many problems between home and school. Wutha Chin explained how Cambodian students in Philadelphia skipped school because it was the only way they could have "freedom" from the rigid rules of parents. A Thaidam student in Des Moines explained that "kids do not like the lack of freedom." A student in Chelsea, Massachusetts was recommended for special education because he kept screaming at his teachers and principal, "Don't you know this is the land of freedom?" In these contexts, young people often believe that freedom means the right to do anything they please without regard for others. This suggests that public schools are failing in one of their original purposes—teaching democracy as a participatory process.

COMMUNICATION AT HOME

The difference between home and school cultures in immigrant households has been documented. Rudolph Vecoli told the National Advisory Panel of the NCAS *New Voices* project in 1987 (NCAS, 1988) that "the essential characteristic of the immigrant child [is] a duality, a doubleness, which sociologists have called marginality. The immigrant child lives in two cultures: that of the family and that of the mainstream society. He is thus exposed to the conflicting values of home, peer group, school, to clashing definitions of the good life, and to the tug-and-pull of competing loyalties." The alienation effect of schools, particularly in a community with a low literacy rate, was first documented by Thomas and Znanieki (1984, pp. 217–218). Writing about the Polish immigrant student at the turn of the century, they noted, "He has interests which the community does not share, ideas which differ from those of others, and information which others cannot obtain, he isolates himself in some measure which is inaccessible to others and—what is worse—strange and unknown to them; thus, he—in certain respects—breaks away from social control."

According to a Cambodian leader, "Parents are ill-equipped to deal with problems of their children growing up on the home front because of a cultural gap between them and their children that aggravates the existing generation gap and the child's knowledge that their parents are not equipped to resolve their problems." A Lao leader said, "Lao parents have a deep sense that they have lost control over their teenagers who they view as 'high-risk,' leaving school before high school graduation and being involved in criminal activities." Even at the level of fulfilling basic needs, parents often feel disempowered because they cannot meet the demands of their children. Thaidam parents complained that their children ask too much of them materially—brand name outfits, expensive sneakers, computers, cars, electric guitars, and video games.

Lack of communication between parents and children inhibits successful partnerships between schools and Asian families. According to Wutha Chin, "Communication between parents and students at home is a number one issue." Not surprisingly, parents all agree that their children should listen to them. In Chicago, a Cambodian parent said, "Kids must learn to listen and understand the parents, where they came from, what kind of life that they have to go through trying to raise you, trying to bring food to the table." One parent explained that even when children listen to parents, they do not do what the parent advises because they think they know better in the American culture. Meanwhile, youngsters claim they are not loved, cared about, or trusted. Most importantly, they say, their parents do not talk with them. Seldom are there family discussions. A Thaidam student explained, "What kids do not like is the lack of family events or time spent together, and lack of communication."

Family break-ups are fairly common, particularly in the Cambodian communities. It would seem that families who experienced the greatest horrors under Pol Pot, then came together again, have very little margin of psychological security for the challenges of adapting to a new life style. "Because of today's tight economic situation affecting most Cambodian families, the incidence of partner and marital break up has increased dramatically over the past several years and shows no signs of leveling off. In Cambodia, the men were the head of their families, here, men may find themselves underemployed and forced to live from the income of their children and wife," explained one Cambodian leader.

In terms of worrying about peer pressures, fitting in, and what their peers think about them, the children of immigrants do not differ from any other adolescents. But some children of Asian newcomers have the added pressure of thinking their parents are pushing them for their own reputations or prestige. Most immigrant parents have higher expectations of their children because they feel they have sacrificed for their children's education. One student noted that while most American-born parents would praise a report card with mostly As and a few Bs, many Asian-born parents want their children to get all As. Other students feel guilty for the suffering that their parents have endured and want to repay them with good grades. Students are afraid of failing. Raising standards increases that fear.

Parents' interpretation of what is "good" and "bad" is often based on a cultural perspective held static in the parents' minds; but if the child has never experienced that cultural context, it may no longer exist for them. Many Asian immigrant and refugee parents tell their children they are bad when the actual behavior may be typical of American teens. In the home culture, bad behavior is equated with antisocial behavior, like organized gangs of school-aged youth, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, and runaways. Hanging out with friends is often interpreted as the child becoming sexually active. Coping with negative expectations and beliefs often places a heavy burden on Asian immigrant youth who are trapped between two cultures.

Wutha Chin described the significance of crossing the threshold in the Cambodian community today, "When you come home, everything changes. You have to be really quiet, and really sensitive to things, be a good boy. You can't go out or make phone calls. That's frustrating. You want to look up to someone, but your parents don't have so much to offer you. Most of the parents don't speak English; sometimes, they have difficulty reading and writing, even in their own language. So kids think, 'My parents are very, very low people,' and they want to go after someone who's higher. And parents, sometimes, when the kids have problems, they don't look at themselves. They blame the kid or they blame American kids. They say, 'Oh, you now become an American kid? You don't speak my language anymore. You want to be an American kid. You want to have *freedom* and things like that.' "

COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOOL

It is difficult to build a true home/school partnership if school staff are unwilling to make necessary efforts to reach out to individual families, parents, and community-based organizations (CBOs). This project found that only occasionally did school staff make direct reference to the Asian immigrant communities from which many of their students come, or to the ethnic organizations that serve those communities. Schools at only two sites explicitly articulated the notion of shared power and equity in their definitions of partnership. In contrast, CBOs consistently emphasized the need to foster effective communication.

The tendency for communication between schools and parents to be one-way is driven, in part, by an authentic difficulty in surmounting barriers to language and culture. In many cases, lack of translators is an impediment to the most basic communication. "I cannot speak the language, how can I get involved in schools?" asked a Khmer parent in Chicago. A Vietnamese parent explained that he does not feel comfortable speaking English; he feels more comfortable speaking his first or second language.

Without interpreters or primary language speakers in the school, many parents cannot call the school because no one at the office speaks Khmer, Lao, Hmong, Vietnamese, or Tagalog. One Cambodian father in Philadelphia explained how difficult it was for his family to help their children when there was nobody at school that could communicate with him in his native language. A Lao parent in San Diego explained that he wants to have someone at school who speaks Laotian so the school will call him in a language he understands. Such a person would also serve to make parents more comfortable when they come into school to ask for help.

Where does an immigrant parent go with a specific problem if there is no translator? One student who was taking five courses had a problem with one teacher. His mother did not know where to go or what to do. A community representative became involved because the mother "was afraid that if she went to school they would think she was looking for trouble. That's what happens with a lot of Cambodian parents. Because they think that the teachers are the second parents for their kids, whatever the teachers say, they believe it's O.K." Parents also commonly believe that the school system is blocking them from going straight to school and talking with the principal. They believe they are unable to meet directly with the principal because they cannot speak English. Many fear the school environment because they have had negative educational experiences themselves. They fear asking for help. If they do so, there are few, if any, teachers who speak the parents' primary language.

Often, in their attempts to overcome language barriers, school personnel inadvertently create other problems when, for example, they use children as interpreters to communicate with the parents. Because children might speak English without an accent and be able to interpret adequately in certain situations, they may not have the skills to translate the language of professional educators adequately, resulting in confusion for the school staff and humiliation for the parents.

When children are placed in the role of interpreter, a number of negative outcomes can result. There may be a significant reversal of roles and power dynamics in the parent/child relationship. For example, the parents' role may be undercut if a child is asked to deliver a message about the child's behavior or failure to attend school. In such a situation, it is very easy for a child to manipulate the message or fail to deliver it entirely to avoid the consequences of a parent's displeasure. When children are used as interpreters, serious confidentiality issues can arise when a child does not understand when and how to preserve confidentiality. Finally, a child who has mastered English might not have the ability or inclination to communicate with adults in their first language about the subject he or she has been requested to report.

Phone calls, letters, and other materials sent home in English are often accessible only to the children. In many households, the child opens all of the mail and has the opportunity to dispose of letters from the school before the parent sees them. Even when letters notifying the parent that their child has missed a number of days of school are translated into the parents' primary language, they often arrive a week late because of the extra time required for translation.

In Asia, during times of peace, parents could turn to neighbors for help with their children. A Filipina in Seattle explained that in the Philippines when a child goes through hardship, "Parents may go to their neighbors and say, 'Hey, look, when you see Liz down the street, if she's coming home late, tell her to come home.' And that neighbor has their authority, the right to say, 'Your parents are looking for you, go home now.' And I'm going to have to respect that because of the community strength, I'm going to listen. Unfortunately when a Filipino family immigrates to the United States, we don't take our neighbors with us."

RISING DROPOUT RATES

Across the United States, Asian immigrant and refugee parents agree that one important barrier to a positive school/family partnership is that their children are skipping school regularly. As a result, they believe there is an increasing dropout rate—especially in middle schools—for the children of Asian immigrants and refugees and schools are not addressing this situation. Parents do not know why their children do not want to stay in school. They want the schools to tell them why and what to do about it.

Historically, the children of immigrants have always had a high rate of early school leaving. At the turn of the century, high dropout rates among the children of Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants were accredited to children working in factories and the lack of enforcement of child labor laws (Perlmann, 1988). dropout rates paralleled high rates of truancy, retention in schools where "one is two or more years older than the normal age for his grade" (Tyack, 1974, p. 242), older age at arrival in schools, and low IQ scores. In the first half of the 20th century, leaving school was considered a class issue, with members of the working class tracked into subjects to prepare them for manual work and children from middle class homes prepared for college (Spring, 1976). The children of immigrants and others from the working class often left school early to do precisely what they were expected to do—work.

In the 1920s, sociologists and charity volunteers were concerned with the "second generation problem." They noted that "immigrant children figured more prominently in statistics of crime, juvenile delinquency, and other forms of social pathology than had their immigrant parents...such antisocial behavior was attributed to the breakdown of the immigrant family, the collapse of traditional norms, the erosive effects of American materialism and individualism" (Vecoli, 1987, p. 4). Put in the political context of the time, "antisocial meant failure to assimilate to American norms of behavior, and concern for homogenizing American beliefs and behavior reached a fever pitch" (Tyack, 1974, pp. 180–181).

Since World War II, attention has focused on perceived educational deficits in poor families and differences between the cultures of the home and classrooms as explanations for high levels of dropouts among low-income families. Yet, none of these theories adequately answers the question posed by Asian immigrant parents, "Why don't our children want to stay in school?"

Answers provided by the children themselves may lend insight into why they, and possibly earlier groups, don't stay in school. In contrast to the model minority assumption that Asian students are academically successful, or perhaps because of this assumption, low achievement levels are one reason why the children of many Asian newcomers do not feel comfortable in school.

Negative classroom experiences are characteristic of why students skip school. One student explained that "no one wanted me to do well." Other students explained that kids skip school because of harassment by other students and their teachers. They feel bad when they are at school. "Teachers don't care. They don't want us there," explained a student. Another student said, "Sometimes, in the classroom, kids feel embarrassed, discriminated against, or isolated. When you don't speak the language and you do really bad in class, teachers start to ignore you. Out of 30, 31 kids, you're probably the only kid that the teacher never talks to."

A high school student who became a gang member said, "They treat Asians different. Teachers think Asians don't understand because they're quiet. They don't pick them—you have to raise your hand. They don't fool around or joke with Asians. They think Asians are different."

A 14-year-old was told by his teacher that there was no reason for him to return to school because he had missed too many days. After the parents sent a community representative to talk with an administrator at the school, he was allowed back in. But when his teacher saw him in school again, she asked him what he was doing there. The student did not feel welcome in her class, so he hung around outside. The teacher reported him as truant. He was sent to a disciplinarian who suspended him for one week. He told his parents it was for two weeks so he would not have to confront his teacher sooner.

Some schools allow children ten absences before notifying parents; other schools allow more. In one school district, parents did not know what to do about a child who did not want to go to school. They went to the school for help, but school staff failed to inform the parents that the child had not attended school for over 100 days. Parents usually find out about absences from the child's report card. However, report cards are issued in English and are unfamiliar to preliterate and semiliterate parents. Most adults can understand numbers, regardless of their literacy level in English or any other language, but the form of the report card is intimidating and few school personnel take the time to explain to parents where to find the number of days absent. Even when parents question their children, the children may lie. One Mien girl, an otherwise respectful youngster, explained to her mother that the school made a mistake.

Parents are concerned not only about truancy and high dropout rates, but about why their children are developing behavior that exhibits lack of respect for the institutions of family or school. Their concerns are valid. The struggle for civil rights in this country has provided a legacy of alienated minority students. John Ogbu (1987, p. 334) warned that "the real issue in the school adjustment and academic performance of minority children is not whether the children possess a different language or dialect, a different cognitive style, a different style of interaction, a different cognitive style, a different communication style, or a different style of socialization or upbringing [but]...whether or not the relationship between the minorities and the dominant-group members who control the public schools has encouraged the minorities to perceive and define school learning as an instrument for replacing their cultural identity with the cultural identity of their 'oppressors' without full reward or assimilation; and whether or not the relationship between the minorities and the schools generates the trust that encourages the minorities to accept school rules and practices that enhance academic success."

DISAGREEMENTS ABOUT DISCIPLINE

Many Asian parents want to know what to do about their children's behavior in school. There is little disagreement that "students yelling at teachers is unacceptable," a complaint of several parents, but there is widespread disagreement as to how to handle children who misbehave. Often the parents' solution is to use force or to express their anger verbally, but their children frequently just walk away, explained one parent, "because they're here and this is a free country." Child protection laws have taken away traditional methods of punishing a child, but the alternatives commonly used by U.S. parents usually do not work as well in the home cultures of Asian families where norms of behavior have changed radically as a result of immigration. "Time out" and removal of privileges are empty threats in households where children play the role of adults in most communication with the outside world.

In the U.S., children can use child protection laws to threaten their parents. Hmong parents in Minneapolis unanimously expressed their anger at a school for teaching children that parents have no right to punish them. A community leader explained, "If you discipline your child in a certain way, you have the Child Protective Services on your back. It's a problem for the parents. We explain to them that you can discipline your child in a certain way." Instead, some parents do nothing. They are afraid even to say anything because they fear their children will call the police. "And I can't speak the language. When the police come, what am I going to do?" one parent asks.

Asian parents feel disempowered by the discipline problem, particularly refugee parents whose only power in the refugee camps was control over their children. Parents wonder why they are required to send their children to school, but are then prevented by child protection laws from enforcing this requirement. Parents asked schools to stop criticizing them for being bad parents. One parent explained, "We parents try our best, we teach our children to respect their elders, especially their teachers who they see every day, we give them their food, and advise them, we help them with their homework, if they read a book, we ask them what it was about."

For parents who were educated in Asia, one of the biggest differences between Asian and American schools is that Asian school staff are allowed physically to discipline the children in their charge. In the United States, schools use suspension and expulsion as the ultimate form of discipline. Asian newcomer parents do not believe in suspension, feeling that it do not solve the problem of their children not wanting to attend school. Instead, they feel, suspension just causes more students to drop out. A Cambodian parent in Chicago explained, "For schools to suspend kids is the easy way to go. The school expels the kid, but the school does not know what is going on with me and my kid. When the school expels a kid, there needs to be a half-way program, especially for middle school students who just hang out." In one community, Hmong parents believed their children "to be the schools' responsibility."

Asian newcomer parents were not commonly aware that state school codes govern the use of suspension by school districts and were unaware of how to change state or local discipline policies. A Hmong parent explained, "We don't know anything about rules of conduct, regulations, policies, and laws in the school system at all. We would appreciate it very much if someone could teach us." Many U.S. public schools fail to adequately communicate school discipline policies to all students and families. This problem is intensified for Asian parents when parents cannot read the school code because it is given to them in English.

BARRIERS CREATED BY SCHOOLS

Teachers and principals often contribute to the creation of barriers to parent participation. When a project consultant suggested the idea of placing Asian parents on the list of speakers for a teacher/parent panel, his intent was to show that parents could also be involved in a leadership workshop. A few teachers immediately opposed the idea, with one saying, "Parents can't do this. They need coaching by teachers. They just cannot present anything. They don't know anything." Parents in the audience were hurt, annoyed, and felt a distinct lack of respect for their abilities. They later complained that the schools needed their help during crises, but the coordination necessary for a crisis response cannot emerge from an empty relationship.

One result of poor school/family communication, language barriers, and failure of school personnel to learn about the cultures of their students is poor attendance by Asian families at school-sponsored events for parents. When this occurs, administrators are often quick to conclude that parents have no desire to be part of the solution to educational problems experienced by their children or the broader school community.

School personnel often tell Asian immigrant parents and communities that a major reason for schools' lack of responsiveness is rooted in limited financial and human resources. For example:

- Schools may say they hesitate to send letters home in primary languages because they worry about the accuracy of verbal and written translations and cannot afford to have translations double-checked for accuracy.
- Schools may say they cannot afford bilingual teachers, aides, or other staff who have the language skills to translate, or, if they do have the resources, they cannot find a "qualified" individual.

But when resources are not directed toward the needs of these students, real problems result. Every public school has a budget intended to support the education of the children who attend it. Decisions are made by administrators and teachers about how to use these resources. Too often, high priority is not assigned to directing resources to meet the needs of Asian immigrant students.

Even when appropriate resources are available, other problems may persist. For example, school staff may be genuinely confused over who in each ethnic group, including school bilingual staff and community leaders, can speak on behalf of the community or an individual student. School staff sometimes complain that they get conflicting information from different members of the same Asian community or from members of a different Asian community who may attempt to speak for a child whose ethnicity varies from their own.

Parent meetings called by school staff are often perceived by schools as a solution to family/school communication problems, but parents frequently see them as another barrier to be overcome. In the case of Asian immigrant and refugee parents, services of interpreters are often needed, but not provided. Many parents whose first language is not English are reluctant to speak publicly. Even if they do speak English, they are usually not accustomed to speaking out. Often the school has the experience of having a number of parents come to the first meeting, but few come to subsequent ones. Parents report that they often feel that school staff wants them to come to meetings to criticize them, or ask them to assume more responsibilities than the realities of their lives permit. For immigrant and refugee parents, transportation is often a problem. Many Hmong mothers, for example, still do not drive. All too often, schools fail to provide child care during meetings, despite the fact that the average refugee woman from Southeast Asia has five or more children.

Family size also affects attendance at parent meetings in another way. A family with several children may be expected to attend parent meetings at several schools at the same time. Schools often schedule meetings at times that are not convenient. Immigrant parents may work two or three jobs at odd hours. When a working parent attends a meeting at their child's school, it may cause the parent to miss an entire day of work. As a staff member of Filipino Youth Activities in Seattle, Washington explained, "Parents who need help are not accessible most of the time. If we are able to get word to them, it is a whole day thing. They knock off from work."

Community representatives also find that school meetings are scheduled at times that may be convenient for school staff, but difficult for others to attend. Kao Lee, president of the Hmong Parent Teacher Student Organization in Minneapolis, Minnesota told project staff, "The most difficult part for me as a PTO president is that I have my job at a company and I work nine to five. When the school calls me sayings we have a meeting and we would like you to come to the meeting at this time, I turn around and say, 'Well, I work until five.' And they say, 'Well, that may be too late for us,' implying that they need to leave work early."

Cambodians have the burden of recent memories of life under Pol Pot when meetings were places of punishment and educated people were killed. Schools were used for jails, torture, and mass killings. "You don't want to know" was taught in lieu of regular school subjects, explained one young man from Rhode Island. As a result, explained a Cambodian community worker, "It is still the case that the majority of Cambodian parents continue to act reluctant or feel that they have no say in society in general and in the education of their children in particular."

In one school district, no Cambodian parents went to school meetings or called the school during an entire year "because we do not understand what was said and why," explained one parent. He further explained that Cambodian parents do not go to meetings "because those meetings are not important to us and even if we come to meeting, we don't understand your issues anyway." Another Cambodian man explained that "when they understand the issues, they will be involved." Even if they have a Khmer translator, Cambodians will not go alone. Parents blame the schools, saying, "They do not understand that we have problems with the language, with transportation, or that we may live far away. On the other hand, we are afraid to go alone because this is a new country, a new system, and a different language."

Finally, many public school personnel hold low performance expectations for English learners, particularly for those who are foreign-born and appear less "American" than their U.S.-born peers. For students, this results in academic placement in classes characterized by their simplified content and low teacher expectations for achievement. This same low level of expectations by teachers and administrators is often extended to parents of these same groups of children and their communities.

Low expectations for parents who are poor and members of racial, ethnic, or cultural minority groups, regardless of whether they are U.S.- born or foreign-born, is often reflected in the types of parent outreach and school-based programs that schools design and implement. Many school administrators, when questioned, will respond by saying that they do a lot for immigrant parents at their school. However, when pressed for specifics, these same administrators will usually reveal that the activities offered—often sessions on "parenting" or English language classes—keep parents in passive roles. Although the content of the activities and their goals may not be inherently bad, the way the classes are taught does not prepare parents to play empowered roles as advocates for the school success of their children.

Particularly distressing to parents is parenting training by professionals who understand very little about the strengths and weaknesses of their culture in regards to raising children. Education professionals are often U.S.-born and are frequently unaware that many of their assumptions about child rearing are ethnocentric and culturally biased. Not only do they miss the opportunity to learn from the continuity of knowledge that has been passed down from one generation to the next in multigenerational homes, but their assumptions may be offensive to parents who hold a different cultural perspective.

For the most part, the project found, in spite of recognition of the critical importance of family involvement, that schools tend to define parent involvement as parent education and training. Similarly, schools tend to perceive the goal of building mutual respect of culture as the need for parents to learn about school culture. Parents' voices and the articulation of their needs are not often reflected in program development. The approach at most school sites in the study tends to reflect an ethnocentric, unidirectional notion of partnership by school staff.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL-BASED PARENT PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS

Poor Programs

- Teachers assume that native-born parents not active in school are apathetic and foreign-born parents are unable to participate. Therefore, they do not seek to include them.
- Programs are designed to protect teachers and administrators from unwanted parent interference in school. This may include avoiding parents whom schools do not want to educate (Decker, Gregg, and Decker, 1995, p. 38).
- Diversity in schools is limited to an annual celebration encouraging students and their families to do a "show and tell" about their cultures and typical foods eaten at home or on holidays.
- Schools focus on parents only to solicit their support of current school programs.
- Schools focus on educating parents about school policies, rules, concerns, and expectations.

Effective Programs

- Strong coordination between school officials, teachers, psychologists, evaluators, parents, and—sometimes—CBOs to design programs to meet the needs of children with special, diagnosed requirements.
- School personnel, parents, students and CBOs work together to build communication and better relationships.
- Parents are involved with community representatives and school personnel to improve student achievement at school.
- Schools include parents' histories and "home funds of knowledge" in the curriculum (Decker, Gregg, and Decker, 1995, pp. 39–40; Moll, 1992).
- Parents, students, community representatives, and school personnel work together to help each other achieve their goals.
- School personnel help parents to create better learning environments in the home, and at the same time learn about the home and culture.

FAILURE TO INCLUDE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Schools often differ with CBOs on goals and objectives. School staff often insist that parents develop specific "skills" on the assumption that foreign-born parents, whose primary language is not English, do not know how to raise their children. This assumption creates a major barrier to building equitable partnerships between home and school by placing professional educators in a superior position to parents. Communication and expectations remain largely a one-way street. CBOs, on the other hand, express a consistent desire to develop positive relationships between parents and schools, including administrators, staff, and teachers as a critical strategy to help students achieve academically, improve behavior, and build positive attitudes towards school.

Unfortunately, CBOs with Asian immigrant constituencies are often new, fragile structures with agendas that far exceed available resources. Many do not have offices or paid staff, but are run by volunteers, many of whom must work at

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full-time jobs as well. For example, the NAFSPP participating Lao organizations in San Diego are entirely operated by volunteers who also serve on the boards of a number of other organizations.

The role of cultural broker is not easy. One community leader explained, "We talk to both the kid and the parents. Asian parents don't like that because they're not here to be educated. They think they're O.K. It's the kid who has the problems, and they want us to advise the kid. But we do [it] in the Cambodian way. We don't say, 'Oh, you need a counselor,' because Cambodians think only crazy people need counseling. When people came into Philadelphia, the first thing they asked was 'Where is the Cambodian Association?' We are part of the community, grown up here, established by the people. So the people know us automatically. They expect us to have all kinds of programs. They expect us to do everything."

Another community leader explained the dangers of speaking publicly as not only being misunderstood by school personnel, but risking insulting another member of the immigrant community who may feel challenged or corrected by an Asian parent in public, noting, "That is the most humiliating thing that can happen—to be corrected by a member of your own community in a public arena." Community representatives also face barriers created by gang members who oppose their efforts to get their members back into school. A community representative in Des Moines was harassed and physically attacked by an Asian gang in retaliation for taking a strong stand against gang activity.

Among the issues which most concern community representatives is the accuracy of school dropout data. Lack of information about Asian immigrant students who dropout of elementary and middle school is a severe barrier to the monitoring of student progress.

THE NEED FOR ACTION

The failure by most schools to recognize the diversity of the Asian American community frequently leads to one-way communication between schools and families. The limited communication that does exist is dominated by educators telling parents what to do, rather than learning what it is that parents already do for the education of their children. Language barriers and lack of translators impede even the most basic communication. This one-way flow of information exacerbates existing problems of trust. Community-based organizations recognize the need for school personnel to work with families, yet, the value of these organizations as cultural brokers is rarely recognized by schools.

Asian immigrant and refugee parents often regard education as the key to their children's futures. They are particularly concerned about the growing alienation of their children, not only from their families, but from school. They are worried about growing truancy and dropout rates, but feel that schools are not taking this trend seriously. At the same time, they feel their ability to influence their children's behavior is bound by their own lack of experience in American schools and by their inability to discipline children in traditional ways.

Parents want to know their rights in regards to the education and disciplining of their children. They want their children to understand the civic and social responsibilities that come with "freedom." Most importantly, they want to trust the teachers and school personnel in charge of the education of their children. Yet, there has been little effort made on the part of many school districts to engender such trust.

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THE THAIDAM

BY DINH VAN LO

In November of 1975, under the leadership of former Governor Robert D. Ray, the people of Iowa opened their state, their cities, and their hearts to a group of refugees known as the Thaidam, a little known ethnic group from Southeast Asia. (The words Thaidam, Tai Dam, or Thaidam are used to refer to the same group of people.) Called "professional refugees" by some, the Thaidam have been forced throughout their history to flee their homelands, most recently as a result of the Vietnam War. Today more than 95 percent of the 2700 Thaidam people in the United States live in Iowa's cities and towns, making Iowa the "world capital of free Thaidam" and Des Moines a central village.

The Thaidam belong to the Tai group that originated in the southern part of Mongolia, then spread from the Himalayan Mountains south into Burma, Thailand, Laos, the southern part of China, and Northern Vietnam. Their last unified kingdom was the Kingdom of Nan Chao (619–1283) which was destroyed by the Mongols under Kublai Khan in an invasion that drove the Tai people south of the current Chinese border. The Tai divided themselves into groups, one going to Laos, another following the Menam River to Thailand, and the third group—the Thaidam—following the Black River to North Vietnam where they built their towns and cities.

The Thaidam tried to live peacefully with their neighbors—the Vietnamese, the Chinese, and the Laotian people. However, because of their strategic trading locations, violent conflicts for power and conquest constantly occurred in the Thaidam areas between Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, China, and among local Thaidam lords themselves.

In the 1800s, the French colonized Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, placing the autonomous Tai regions under the French Protectorate. From 1947 to 1954, the Thaidam had their own Tai Federation. In 1952, many Thaidam who were French soldiers, government employees, or top government officials were evacuated to Hanoi with their families for safety.

In 1954, however, the French lost their colonies. In North Vietnam, the communists, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, defeated the French in Dien Bien Phu (also known as Muong Theng, City of the God). The Thaidam were forced to move out of their homeland and became political refugees. Many moved to Laos because of similarities in language and culture; others moved to South Vietnam. In North Vietnam, almost one million persons were trapped under the hand of the communists.

In the meantime, the U.S. government replaced the French in Indochina. The U.S. wanted to stop communism from spreading south. It sent troops and war materials to South Vietnam. However, in 1973 the U.S. signed a peace treaty with Ho Chi Minh in Paris. As a result, U.S. troops pulled out of Vietnam. This event tremendously affected the lives of the Thaidam. On May 10, 1975, after building their homes, businesses, and their lives in Laos for 20 years, the Thaidam sought refuge in Thailand.

In the refugee camps in Thailand, Thaidam leaders wrote letter after letter asking for asylum for their people. Thaidam people resettled in Canada, Australia, France, England, and Germany. In the United States, Iowa was the only state to respond to the pleas of the Thaidam and to agree to invite them to resettle as a group.

WHY THE THAIDAM CHOSE TO BECOME REFUGEES

1. **French Indochina became communist.**
2. **The Thaidam feared reprisal from the communist regime. The communist Vietnamese called them "the enemy of the people" because of their association with the French.**
3. **They wished to provide a brighter future for their children. They hoped that Thaidam children would be able to experience peace once and for all and grow up as free persons.**

THAIDAM CULTURE

The Thaidam believe in benevolent and malevolent spirits—supernatural forces that decide their lives and destiny. The creator of heaven and earth is "Then Luong." On earth the "Ma Phi," henchmen of "Then," control every affair of man's deeds. Therefore, Thaidam hold man to be a part of nature. Man is superior over nature, but man is happiest when he is at one with nature. He does not try to rise above it; he accepts what life holds for him. However, Thaidam are very tolerant of others' beliefs.

The influence of Confucianism can also be felt in Thaidam society. The Thaidam person believes in a strong sense of cultural-historical continuity and stability. The goal of the perfect individual is to improve himself and his family, and make his country prosperous and the world peaceful. Collective, active strategies of resource-pooling and networking based on tightly knit extended family organizations for general support are well-developed in the Thaidam society.

In Iowa, most Thaidam are somewhat related to each other. The parents, brothers, sisters, other members of the family, and elders have the responsibility to help raise a child. Child-rearing is generally more conservative and less permissive than in U.S. culture. Young people are taught to show respect to parents, grandparents, and deceased ancestors; disrespect is not tolerated. For the Thaidam, the aged are society's most respected people.

The Thaidam are peace-loving people. They enjoy jokes and humor. They are friendly and good friends to others. They have a reputation for honesty, loyalty, and industriousness. Their hospitality to guests is unlimited; if you visit them, their house is your house. They love to eat and to discuss community affairs and responsibilities.

EDUCATION

Thaidam identity, language, and culture have been preserved and transmitted from parents to children. Formal schooling was not offered until the 1900s. The youngsters learned through love songs, rich proverbs, poems, legends, and letters. In April

1947, François Martini completed the romanization of the Tai language under the direction of the French High Commission (*Bulletin Française D'Extreme-Orient,* 1954). However, the romanized alphabet was not extensively used or accepted by a majority of the Tai population.

The Thaidam, who had to move from one country to another, knew that education was the key to equality and a good life. People with education have always been highly respected, especially teachers and administrators who are viewed as an extension of the family. Parents trust school personnel to do all they can to educate their children. Thaidam parents participate in the education of their children by preparing them with discipline and moral support. In school, parents expect the same or higher standards from teachers and administrators.

BARRIERS TO THAIDAM PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL

The United States of America is a complex society. Since Thaidam parents came to this country with a different frame of mind than the mainstream population, they may be uncertain about how to respond when encouraged to be involved in the education of their children.

BARRIERS TO THAIDAM PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

1. Parents feel lost. Many are unfamiliar with the school programs of this country. They feel ignorant and embarrassed by their limited skills and they feel incapable of effective involvement. They try to protect themselves from "losing face."

   Example: Parents were asked to come to the school to participate in solving a problem experienced by their child. They were asked to give their opinions and their advice. Instead of coming to the meeting, the parents called to say that they could not attend. They canceled the meeting because they didn't want to show their ignorance and lose face, not knowing how to act or how to satisfy the school's demand.

2. Parents cannot rely solely on their tightly knit extended family organization with its collective strategies of resource-pooling and decision-making because their family and community members are readjusting to the demands and pressures of American life.

   Example: A group of young people were vandalizing school property. The extended families and communities could not solve the problems by themselves. They had to rely on outside agencies such as the police for assistance.

3. Parents don't have much time for their children. They work one or two jobs to make ends meet. Therefore, they have a general lack of knowledge of middle-class values as they relate to education. This causes them to be cut off from much of school life.

   Example: Since both parents work, they may not have the time to be in the PTA, to attend school conferences and ESL classes, or to teach their language and culture to their children.

4. Parents feel resentment and anger toward schools for causing their children to somewhat abandon their cultural heritage. Their child seems to be lost in both the Thaidam and the American society.

   Example: The schools required Asian students to take a foreign language and culture class such as French or Spanish. However, the Asian students' language and culture were not appreciated and offered as a class, or accredited as a foreign language.

   Example: A Thaidam high school girl was accepted on the cheerleading squad and periodically wanted to stay to attend the school-sponsored party after the game. The parents cannot understand how this activity could be related to school programs.

The Thaidam community and its leaders have struggled for many years to assist and support Thaidam parents and students to be successful in the United States. From their long experience as refugees, the Thaidam know that to be successful in life one must first be proud of one's own race and ethnic background. Second, one must be educated; and finally, the community has to work collectively to instill success for the Thaidam as a whole.

We know that parents' involvement in the school directly benefits the schools, the students, and the parents themselves. Strong partnerships between school and families lead to students' success in school and throughout their lives. However, as one parent pointed out, Thaidam parents never had much chance to go to school because they were always on the run as refugees during the last 43 years. During those years, they were refugees four times.

In addition, many Thaidam parents who came to the United States have low-paying jobs, don't speak much English, and feel lost in a white, middle-class society that they don't understand. This linguistic and cultural mismatch causes Thaidam parents to lose their confidence and status. In spite of these barriers, Thaidam students have performed satisfactorily in Iowa, bringing pride to their community as they graduate as valedictorians or in the top quarter of their classes; others earn B.A., M.A., and M.D. degrees from colleges and universities.

THAIDAM SAYINGS

To be a perfect person
Persist in the pursuit of your education
Consistent practices
Provide a strong educational background
Your education is for both body and mind

If you know how to teach your child,
The child will be somebody respectful
If you see the right way to teach your child,
Your child will be a perfect individual

Teach your children
Teach when they are young
Teach your children

Teach them like playing the "ting" *
Teach them, teach them all the time
Your children mature
Prestige comes to the parent
Children prosper,
Household is complete

Children:
Debt to your father is bigger than mountains
Debt to your mother is like an endless source of water that gives life

*Thaidam guitar with 2 strings and a dried water gourd as sound box.

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THE VIETNAMESE CHILD IN SCHOOL AND AT HOME

LESSONS FROM THE PAST AND ISSUES OF THE PRESENT

BY NGOC-DIEP THI NGUYEN, PH.D.

According to the 1990 census, there are more than 600,000 Vietnamese in the United States. Of this number, 33 percent are school-aged children (Lewis, 1994). Since the historic exodus from Vietnam in 1975, stories of successes and failures—both on the part of Vietnamese students and their teachers—point to the complexity of the task of educating these students. Numerous articles written during the past 20 years describe their cultural and educational needs. In the meanwhile, the profile of the Vietnamese student changes as successive groups of Vietnamese migrate to the United States, propelled by different geopolitical factors. Consequently, the questions educators ask ourselves must also change in order to meet the needs of these students in the 1990s.

In this article, I review the lessons of the past and discuss their usefulness for Vietnamese people who have recently resettled in the United States and raise several issues that have emerged over time in regard to the education of Vietnamese students.

LESSONS OF THE PAST

Beginning with the massive exodus of refugees from Vietnam to the United States in 1975, American schools found themselves overwhelmed and unprepared for the many Vietnamese students who showed up at their doors without warning and without the English language. Most schools did what they could. Since these students were petite in comparison to their American peers, many were put in lower grades than their ages would indicate in order for them to learn English more easily. Some schools categorized these children as special education students and placed them in learning disabilities classes as well as in speech and language classes. In my case, the principal at my high school suggested that I be put in the ninth grade, although I was entering the twelfth grade.

Even in school systems where bilingual education and/or English as a Second Language was available, there were few school staff who had previous teaching experience with this population and fewer still who were bilingual educators. Where there were enough students to warrant the hiring of certified bilingual Vietnamese teachers, the number of certified bilingual Vietnamese classroom teachers slowly increased. Yet, Vietnamese bilingual instructional aides constituted the backbone of most programs.

American educators, during the early years of contact, searched for basic information to help them deal with the linguistic, educational, and cultural differences between their students and themselves. The questions and issues of the era were reflected in the articles written between 1976 and 1989. They are, in summary, the following:

1. What is the Vietnamese culture and what is the impact on the learning of Vietnamese students? (Oanh and Michael, 1977; Nguyen, 1981)
2. How does the Vietnamese system of education work and how is it different and similar to American education? (Nguyen, 1981)
3. What is the Vietnamese language system and how does it affect the learning of English by Vietnamese students? (Nguyen, 1986)
4. What are some general strategies that a teacher can use to teach a Vietnamese child? (Dao, 1980)
5. What is the acculturation process experienced by students and how can teachers help? (Nguyen, 1988)
6. What is the refugee experience of the Vietnamese people and how does it affect both acculturation and schooling? (Nguyen, 1989)

An analysis of these articles shows that early concerns were broad in scope. Most educators were looking for global understanding of the Vietnamese students and their families. Unprepared and lost, teachers used the information that was available to them as a guide, a road map for travelers. Cultural generalizations were applied without much attention given to the diversity among Vietnamese students. Issues in the early years were also unconcerned with systemic effects *per se*, and focused on the effectiveness of teaching within the classroom walls, and the interaction between students and teachers.

Later, issues of programs and methodologies emerged (Nguyen, 1989). By this time, the second wave of Vietnamese refugees had also arrived, representing a much broader spectrum of socioeconomic status and educational background than the privileged first wave of refugees. Many were unaccompanied minors placed with U.S. foster families and, later still, many were Amerasians coming to their fathers' homeland for the first time. This new group of students represented new issues and questions that were much more specific and serious. Issues such as illiteracy, lack of formal schooling, and war trauma began to emerge more frequently, forcing educators to consider solutions to more complex educational and social needs.

By 1990, handbooks and guides on how to meet the educational needs of Vietnamese children could easily be obtained from school systems with large numbers of Vietnamese students. The California Department of Education published many such useful guides. Many of these lessons of the past, even after 20 years, are still valuable, providing information about the characteristics of Vietnamese root culture, the Vietnamese language system, and the acculturation process of students. However, this information alone no longer suffices. After two decades, Vietnamese communities have established themselves in America. The Vietnamese student today is the product of his or her family's multigenerational attempt to integrate their root traditions with the way of life in America.

The extent to which any of the early body of information can be applicable to a student or to a family depends on a variety of factors, including socioeconomic status, level of social integration, frequency of contact with the root culture, and date of immigration. It is natural that the questions we ask today about Vietnamese students and their families are more complicated. While there is no empirical study yet to identify the "typical" Vietnamese family, there are presently new voices emerging within the Vietnamese community who speak of the Vietnamese experience in America and their double identity.

The following section is an attempt to capture those perspectives in the Vietnamese community and, thus, the family. It is only when we see the variety of experiences within and among Vietnam families that we can have an understanding of the intricate and complex nature of life for the Vietnamese family and an understanding of the Vietnamese student's complex world outside the classroom.

ISSUES OF THE PRESENT

While the number of Vietnamese nuclear families are on the rise, most Vietnamese still consider their grandparents, parents, siblings—and often uncles, aunts, and first cousins—as part of their family.

Let us suppose our "typical" family in question has a grandfather, parents, and four children, ranging from the age of 21 to 10. This family may have just come to the United States or this family may have been here for the last 20 years. This factor alone would force us to have different concerns in regards to the education of the children.

Let us first consider the question of culture. If the family has been in the United States for more than 10 years, it is likely that some of the children were born and raised in this country. The extent to which the children are taught traditional Vietnamese ways varies greatly from family to family. It is not unlikely that the children, much to their grandfather's chagrin, behave more like their American peers. Some children may not even know the Vietnamese language.

Consequently, in regard to the issue of culture, a list of generalizations about the Vietnamese culture may not be as useful as in the past. In addition, assuming that any Vietnamese child knows his or her Vietnamese root culture can turn out to be a serious mistake. In this case, a more appropriate question to be raised is the issue of self-selected cultural identity. Vietnamese adolescents and young adults consider this issue essential to their self esteem. Their self-identification, in turn, influences their behavior in schools. Likewise, parents' views and wishes for their children are colored by their own perceptions of their cultural identity.

If the family recently came to America, they are dealing with issues of acculturation and learning a new way of life. Their immigration experience may not be as traumatic as those considered "boat people," who risked their lives in small boats to flee Vietnam. Yet, if they have come directly from Vietnam as part of the Orderly Departure Program, information about refugees who spent months or years living in camps in Southeast Asian countries of asylum may not be useful in trying to educate the children in these families. As to the second issue of differing educational systems, this information is only useful if the family has recently immigrated. If the family has been here for a long period of time, a history of the student's educational experiences in American schools is more appropriate. A more critical concern may be the difference between an urban school and a rural school here in the United States.

If there are issues of language for Vietnamese students raised in the United States, they usually emerge in the form of poor reading and writing skills. In such cases, rather than considering issues of interlingual interference, one must ask questions that are more intralingual in nature, trying to understand the gaps that occurred in the learning of English by these students.

Finally, in regard to the issue of acculturation, educators must be aware that any Vietnamese student entering their classrooms could range from being a new immigrant, to a sojourner student, to a student who has grown up in America and considers it home. Consequently, the range of sociocultural needs extends from culture shock, to more complex acculturation issues, to concerns about civic identity. As the Vietnamese community grows in urban centers, there are also typical urban issues that need to be resolved, such as gang memberships and drug usage.

CREATING AN INTIMATE PORTRAIT

The issues in the education of Vietnamese students are becoming more complex, rendering impractical many useful strategies of the past. After 20 years in this country, issues faced by long-established Vietnamese families begin to reflect issues of the larger American society. Yet, with new immigrants still arriving, old issues are still being dealt with today. The new challenge for educators seeking to serve the Vietnamese family is to learn from the past, while being willing to work within a much more complex and integrated paradigm.

This implies that easy answers will not be found in handbooks and useful guides, nor will they be presented neatly in lists of what to do and not to do when working with Vietnamese students. It requires us to ask new questions that may not have answers and to raise new issues that require more creative and collaborative strategies to solve. It requires us to throw away cultural generalities in favor of specific investigation into the family and individual history of each of our students and to find out how they weave their Vietnamese and American cultural heritage to create their own identity. Perhaps, when we can tell that story and create an intimate portrait of how a student weaves his or her double identity and how he or she is helped in schools to do just that, then we have succeeded in finding out how best to educate that student.

SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LAO PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SCHOOLING OF LAO CHILDREN

BY BOUNLIENG PHOMMASOUVANH, PH.D.

The 1990 census reports that 150,000 Lao people resettled throughout the United States as a result of the change of the Lao government in 1975. These people represent diverse backgrounds in relation to educational attainment, job skills, prior knowledge of western culture, and English-speaking ability. However, they all came with two fundamental, common goals: to escape political reprisal, feelings of insecurity, and fear for their lives; and to seek safe haven and freedom from fear and political coercion. They fled their homeland in confusion and haste for survival and human dignity.

Lao people are known for deep attachment to the land that their families have cultivated for centuries and handed down from generation to generation. During the colonial period, the French became very frustrated when the Lao, upon completing a long and costly educational training, refused to be relocated with a job far from home. The land symbolizes their birth and burial ground. Furthermore, it connects them to the family from which it was inseparable. The extended family of bilateral lineage, which enables a person to freely identify with either the paternal or maternal side, is the most significant social unit. A Lao lives in the image of her family. She plays her proper role by putting the family's wishes first, fulfilling any obligations expected by family members, such as care for aging parents or support of a sibling through school.

Lao people are predominantly Buddhist. Like many religions practiced in Southeast Asia, Buddhism is tinted with animism—a belief system of spirits that lends itself to elaborate rituals and atonement. Lao people closely adhere to Buddhist tenets of tolerance, generosity, kindness, honesty, and almsgiving. Since Buddhists believe in reincarnation, a given life is a culmination of good deeds performed in previous lives. The quality of life a person lives now, by Buddhist standards, will determine the status of life or lives to come.

NEW LIFE IN AMERICA

Lao people in the United States are relatively invisible compared to their three Southeast Asian counterparts: the Cambodian, Hmong, and Vietnamese. It is generally thought that this is attributed to their less direct and formalized connection to the American war effort. This argument, however, has drawn strong reactions from most former Lao army officers in this country, who claim that they, too, were a close ally and fully participated with the Americans against communist aggression. The only difference is that the American military conducted a "secret war" in Laos. As such, the United States wanted to avoid any association with the Lao regular army in its war effort.

Another explanation for the little attention given to the Lao may be that their tragic experience in losing the war and enduring ideological atrocities were not as dramatic as the last-minute helicopter evacuations by the Americans in Saigon and the plight of the Vietnamese boat people, or the Cambodian "holocaust" under Pol Pot. In contrast, the Vientiane government collapsed relatively quietly through a political takeover. Nonetheless, the war has had as devastating an effect on the Lao as any other group. The Lao people in the United States, like their compatriots living in other parts of the world, have suffered immensely from the war and the fall of their country. In addition to the loss of home and material possessions, most have been separated from or have lost members of their families. Many are still experiencing recurring somatic complaints and mental depression as a result of their perilous escape and, for some, mental torture and physical hardship in "re-education" labor camps.

Lao personality and cultural traits might also account for part of their invisibility. The Lao are often characterized as quiet, peace-loving, accommodating, patient, and happy people. They dislike confrontation, value harmony, and do not like to make waves.

The flow of Lao refugees and immigrants almost came to a halt in the late 1980s when American resettlement policy for Lao refugees was shifted from relocating in third countries to an aggressive repatriation program. Most Lao refugees fleeing the country in the late 1980s were held in a detention camp in Thailand for many years. Few were screened to be resettled in third countries. The majority remained in the camp, waiting to be repatriated to Laos. A few thousand came to the U.S. in the 1990s.

As with other newcomers from different parts of the world, some Lao immigrants made a smoother transition into the American cultural environment than others, depending on their respective educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and personal inclination to adopt a new language and culture without feeling as though they were betraying their Lao heritage. It should be remembered that Lao people are very flexible and accommodating. As refugees or immigrants in a new land, it is natural for them to adopt new ways.

Many Lao people are trying to maintain their language and culture. In any sizable Lao community in the United States, there is a Buddhist temple or a community-based organization built by its members for the purpose of maintaining and carrying out their social and cultural functions. There are approximately 50 Buddhist temples in North America that have become worshipping places for most Lao immigrants. Generally, the temple serves as a healing and unifying institution for Lao people whose lives have been disrupted and shattered by their recent uprooting. To them, building a Buddhist temple in a dominantly Christian society symbolizes a basic challenge of forming a new life-vision with competing values. They are still negotiating which home values to keep and which new values to adopt, sorting out which will be most advantageous in their attempt to succeed in America.

Several studies (Robert Bach, John Van Esterick) found that Lao-Americans are more likely to work than their Southeast Asian counterparts, even in their early phase of resettlement. They are considered to be hard and dependable workers with strong loyalty to their employers. For this reason, it is reported that the Lao have the lowest rate of public assistance. However, the high level of participation in the labor forces by the Lao is offset by low-paying, dead-end jobs and low attendance at English classes and other training opportunities. The ironic downside of this willingness to work quickly in order to be self-sufficient, without giving priorities to language and occupational skills, has a long-term effect on future job security and advancement. Education and language barriers remain the primary obstacle to "getting ahead" for Lao-Americans.

It is often found that while the parents value education, they do not seem to invest enough in their children's education, particularly beyond high school. They tend to be content with their children working, even for a meager wage. This attitude might reflect the parents' own low educational attainment. One study (Lewis, 1994) found that about 60 percent of Lao-Americans 25 years and older have either no schooling or less than a high school education, and only 6.6 percent of those 25 years old and over have bachelor degrees or above. In addition, the ambivalence of Lao parents may be a reflection of the problems they have raising and disciplining their children in the new environment. Social adjustment problems have exacted a big toll on Lao families.

The same study reveals some interesting information on Lao in the United States. Lao-Americans are young: 45 percent are under age 17; only 2.2 percent are 65 years and older. They usually do not marry young; only 25 percent of those aged 18 to 24 years old are married. Divorce rates among young married couples are very low—only 4.2 percent of that age group. Approximately one-third of Lao-Americans live beneath the poverty line. One conspicuous characteristic that sets the Lao apart from their Southeast Asian counterparts is their low rate of employment in executive, professional, and technical fields; only 7 percent work in these occupations. At the same time, 32 percent work as machine operators and assemblers. Lao-Americans, in general, tend to work their way out of crime-stricken inner-city living conditions as soon as their economic situation permits. About one-third have succeeded in fulfilling the dream of owning a home.

"The Southeast Asian Refugee Youth Study" (Rumbaud and Ima, 1987) concluded that Lao youth in the San Diego school system performed poorly in school, were quick to adopt American ways, and lacked educational ambition. The researchers' conclusion, although not qualitatively substantiated, was that the parents, in general, did not provide strict supervision of their children and failed to provide adequate support for them at home and at school. They suggested that parents and local leaders provide positive role models for Lao youth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SCHOOLING OF LAO CHILDREN

It is clear from the research data cited above that Lao-Americans face many challenges. With a disproportionately high percentage of youth, their future is at risk if leadership within the Lao community together with parents do not urgently address some fundamental issues related to school performance, educational planning, and active parental involvement in children's education. It is important that Lao parents understand that they share as much responsibility as the school for the success or failure of their children. Their children will have a better chance of success in school if parents pay special attention to their children at home and at school.

As newcomers, Lao parents are confronted with may problems, ranging from adapting to the new society, raising children in the new society, and supporting their families. What is asked and expected of them in regard to their role in their children's education is new and demanding. However, these parents value education very highly and want their children to succeed. It is incumbent upon community leaders, educators, and schools to educate the parents on the important new role they are expected to assume. Parents must work closely with the school to ensure equal opportunities and accessibility to quality programs and services. If children's needs are not attended to during their school-age years, they will not acquire employable skills required in the world of advanced technology and information-processing. These same young people could become a social and economic burden to the society at-large in the future.

Most Lao refugees have been in the United States more than 10 years. Therefore, it is critical that teachers, service providers, and policy makers be sensitive to the behavioral and attitudinal modifications that Lao people, old and young alike, might undergo during their transitional period. If we rely mainly on the cultural and home country education background of the family and students as a guide to understanding their educational and social needs, we would certainly ignore some real adjustments and changes these people have made since their arrival in this country. It is generally true that oral skills for Lao children who have been here longer are better than their reading and writing skills, which take much longer to develop. But oral proficiency must not be the sole criterion for determining a child's academic need and program placement. It is well documented (Cummins, 1983) that reading and writing skills are required for school work.

Several research findings (Cummins, 1986; Heath, 1994; Wong-Fillmore, 1983) suggest that the education of students of language and ethnic minorities must be based not only on their need for English language development and academic achievement, but also on culture, learning style, self-esteem, and family and community participation. When a limited-English-proficient Lao child is sitting in a classroom surrounded by classmates with whom he can hardly communicate and with whom he shares little in common, it can safely be predicted that he has a high level of anxiety and self-consciousness. From a pedagogical point of view, no child can learn in such an environment, even from the best teacher. The child must be made to feel at ease, cared for, and be told he is capable of learning. In addition, the child's language and culture, and his family's and community's relationship to the school and larger society must be carefully considered.

In order to provide appropriate educational services to Lao children, the school must go beyond teaching them English to examine their cognitive and academic skills, and their social and emotional needs. In his article "Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention," Cummins (1983) suggests that only when language-minority students are empowered by their school experiences do they develop the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically. To develop empowering school experiences, he proposes the following:

a. Schools should incorporate each student's language and culture into the curriculum to confers status and power upon language-minority students.
b. Schools should involve parents and the community in the planning and implementation of school programs and activities, including providing help to parents and the community in developing the necessary skills and knowledge base.
c. Schools should practice a pedagogical approach that promotes intrinsic motivation rather than "learned helplessness" promoted by overcorrecting the students' miscues and having low expectations for their academic success;

students should be encouraged to use language actively to generate their own knowledge.

d. Teachers and other professionals involved in student assessment should become advocates for language-minority students rather than labeling and legitimizing the location of the "problem" with the student.

The research findings cited above provide a good framework for educational programs for Lao students in this country. In designing an educational program, policymakers, administrators, and teachers should take into account the academic, social, and cultural needs of the students. The parents and community should work with the school as partners in supporting the children's education. Only when the school, parents, and community are committed to a collaborative partnership can Lao children's educational success be assured. The collaboration can be formed and sustained only when there is mutual trust and respect among the partners involved and their ultimate goal is the academic success of the children being served.

RESETTLEMENT INTO LIMBO

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION OF CAMBODIAN CHILDREN

BY KHATHARYA UM, PH.D.

> **"There were approximately 200 prisoners, in separate halls for males and females...I made a friend in prison. We never talked about anything except food and what we would like to eat if we could have our wishes. Those daydreams made us hungrier, but each day I looked forward to those few minutes before exhaustion overtook us. Those talks kept us going. They made us remember that we were still alive. Even the hunger pain. And I remembered that I have found a friend. One night, I was talking to him as usual—then silence. He had died. But I didn't realize until morning that my friend was dead."**

"S" was 13 years old when he was arrested and imprisoned for attempting to escape an area of mass starvation in democratic Kampuchea. Sitting in his high school classroom in Stockton, California, he, like many of his peers and friends, comes across like the average Californian adolescents in LA Gear High Tops, baseball caps, and college sweatshirts. They like soccer and baseball and agonize over the prospect of buying their first car. With their newly acquired Westernized middle names that reflect attempts to bridge cultural gaps, they seem no different from the thousands of students who file through the corridors of American public schools. But the scars are there, scars of having seen too much, too soon, scars of war and revolution. They are survivors. They were the children of "Angka," the faceless "Organization" that ruled over Cambodia with draconian measures from 1975 to 1978.

After the communist victory in Cambodia in 1975, the country was sealed from outside scrutiny. Thus began a reign of terror that lasted for three years and consumed close to a million lives out of a population of seven million. The stories that filtered out of Democratic Kampuchea numbed the world, born witness by refugees physically and mentally brutalized beyond human comprehension. For many Cambodian refugees, the experiences of war, revolution, and exile have been so extreme that, unable to articulate them, many remain silenced by the "other worldliness" of their pre-resettlement experiences.

Migration contexts are critical not only to the understanding of aspects and processes of refugee adaptation but to the variations underlying them. Despite the frequent tendency to view Southeast Asians as a homogenous community, to lump them together generically as "Indochinese," the refugee communities that resettled in the United States in the aftermath of the Vietnam War reflect tremendous diversity among groups and within groups. Among Cambodian refugees, variations in the time of arrival connote a host of other generalities about social, economic, and psychological background. The 1975 cohort, which constituted the first wave of refugees, tended to reflect higher educational and professional standing. Subsequent waves were principally composed of people of more rural background and generally lower socioeconomic standing. Temporal variations also indicate variations in the process of migration, length and intensity of refugee camp experience, expo-sure to trauma, and, consequently, variations in adaptation experience following resettlement.

Despite intragroup diversity, certain integral aspects of the displacement experience bind Cambodian refugees across class, gender, and time of arrival. Exile is a leveling experience. As Barudy puts it, "Exile is never the fulfillment of a wish; it is a 'forced choice,' necessary to escape danger and survive…it always involves a break or a repetition of the break in the individual's personal and social history which began with the repression" (Barudy, 1987). While refugees may share some commonalties with immigrants, the context of their displacement underscores unique issues facing refugee populations. For the Cambodian community, disruption to their personal, social, and cultural lives began with embroilment of Cambodia in the Vietnam War in 1970 to 1975, culminating in the Khmer Rouge genocide and ensuing diaspora. This compounded and protracted exposure to violence and trauma has had far-reaching impact upon critical institutions in Cambodian culture, society, and psyche. The persistent fluidity which characterizes the Cambodian refugee community in the U.S. is the legacy of profound dislocation and trauma.

STRUCTURAL DESTABILIZATION

The war of 1970 to 1975 created tremendous insecurity and devastation of the rural economy. The resulting population dislocation destabilized the family institution, a process that continued over the next twenty years of social and political turmoil. From 1975 to 1978, the Khmer Rouge regime sought total control over the populace by attacking all institutions that it perceived to challenge its authority. The traditional social system and symbols of authority were systematically dismantled through force and social engineering. Family and religious institutions were principally undermined. "When they beat you, they would say 'see, your parents can't stop that. Only Angkar can stop the beating.'" (Um, 1990)

Designation into gender and age-based work brigades as well as the policy of communal eating meant the physical dispersion of the family unit and the undermining of other aspects of family solidarity. Through food allocation, the regime could purchase loyalty and control both mobility and social interactions. "C" reflected on the destruction of his own family unit, "When a child is hungry, you can get her to do anything for food. Children followed whoever gave them food. They renounced and denounced their parents and each other." (Um, 1990)

Hunger disorients and isolates the individual. "K," now a college student, recalled this experience as a 12-year-old in Pol Pot's Cambodia:

> **"...working in the water from dawn to midnight with no food, we started to feel disoriented. Our brains just stopped functioning. We just did what we were told. One day, we were working next to an adult group and I saw this woman. She looked so familiar, but I couldn't recall where I had seen her before. Then the woman started to call out to me. I heard the voice but it sounded so far away...Finally, this woman touched my shoulder and scooped half of her porridge onto my plate. In my dull mind, from some deep recesses of my thought, I heard myself thinking out loud this must be my mother**

> **because she shared her food with me. Then the food hit my stomach...and it was then that things started to make sense to me again." (Um, 1990)**

The culture of fear, in turn, undermines the ability to think critically:

> **"You couldn't escape the feeling that there was nothing that you could do without them knowing about it. You were even afraid to think. They seemed to know even your silent thoughts." (Um, 1990)**

Thus, silence and unquestioning obedience became the key to survival. "V," now a young mother in Oakland, reflected, "If you think, you die."

Whereas, in traditional Khmer society, one's identity and role are inferred through membership in the broader collective of extended family and community, the Khmer Rouge sought absolute severance of primordial ties. The emphasis on individualism was captured by their motto "sok muy, kbal muy" (one strand of hair, one head). "It was as if we were no longer a family with thoughts and respect for each other. We no longer related to each other the same way" (Um, 1990). Through these attempts at social reengineering and societal reconstruction, the institution of the traditional Khmer family was gravely destabilized. Escape and relocation further contributed to the continued fragmentation of the family institution. In flight, families got separated and untold number of lives were lost during the treacherous trek to the Thai border. The precariousness, uncertainty, and general artificiality of life in refugee camps further impeded the possibility for reintegration. Significantly, Cambodian refugees reflect a much longer internment experience than other Southeast Asian refugee groups, averaging a three- to five-year stay in a camp. (Minnesota Report, 1987)

The purposive undermining of traditional social relations generated long-term impact upon intergenerational family dynamics that became exacerbated in the post-resettlement context. For many Cambodian families, resettlement in the final destination may have provided for a relative sense of physical security, but it does not necessarily mean an end to the challenges facing them. That very institution which has already been gravely undermined by the compounded effects of war, revolution, and displacement becomes even more severely impacted by pressures of resettlement.

With the typical unevenness in the adaptation pace, the family becomes the battleground upon which cultural, normative, and generational conflicts are fought. Intra-familial communication frequently breaks down as children acquire command of the English language at a much more rapid pace than adults and, equally often, at the expense of the primary language. Linguistic adaptation is frequently accompanied by behavioral and normative acculturation to the dominant culture. Expression of individualism and independence, inculcated through socialization at school, for instance, became a source of conflict within the family. Children often find themselves caught in the daily struggle to navigate between the home culture and the multiple cultural forces of their external world and are often left with the feeling of belonging nowhere. The need for social acceptance and group membership frequently leads to gravitation toward at-risk groups. Such membership substitutes for the structure the home environment cannot provide. When denied constructive mediation, intergenerational conflict often results in the actual breakup of the family unit.

Developments over the last two decades have also produced dramatic demographic change. Through death and separation, widows and female-headed households are now significant features of the Cambodian refugee community in the U.S. A study of Southeast Asian refugees in San Diego showed that 50 percent of Cambodian families involve single-female headed households, and 25 percent of the women are widows. The community profile that emerged from an analysis of the 1990 census highlighted the demographic impact of the political developments of the last two decades: 20 percent of Cambodians between the ages of 45 and 64 and more than 50 percent of those 65 years and over have lost a spouse (Lewis, 1994).

Even in families that are intact, women now find themselves in a changing economic role and function. For many families, the distinction between abject poverty and marginality is sustained by the supplemental income generated by women in intensive, low- or semi-skilled labor. While Cambodian women have always played critical economic roles, here in America their ability to find employment must be contrasted with the degree of economic and social demotion experienced by many Cambodian men. Downward occupational mobility is particularly attributed to the 1975 cohort, many of whom were barred from positions of status by non-transferability of credentials and professional licenses, the requirement of costly and lengthy retraining, language barriers, and racism. Likewise, the self-sufficiency enjoyed by many Khmer peasants prior to their displacement, as well as the positive attributes associated with it, is not widely replicated here in America, as many families continue in their struggles with multiple, low-paying jobs or succumb to dependence on general assistance.

The changes in social structure and relations are further evidenced by the changing roles and status of youth in the family. In the attempt to redefine the structure of authority and social relations, the Khmer Rouge bestowed the youth with unprecedented power. The impact can be detrimental, particularly as this role reversal is reinforced in the context of resettlement. For many refugee adults, the loss of control over their lives and destiny that was a function of the political migration experiences became utter powerlessness in the face of changes that continue to confront them in their place of resettlement. Isolated by linguistic and cultural barriers, many parents now rely on their children to be their bridge to the outside world. These youths are bestowed with adult roles and responsibilities, ranging from answering the telephone, to providing translation in the doctor's office or during parent/teacher conferences, to being engaged in critical decision-making; they are, as one parent put it, "our eyes and ears. In this country, we are parents, but we are deaf, mute, and blind" (Um, personal interview). The power that comes with the ability to broker information is often unchallenged. One parent was shocked to learn that her son was failing in school, stating that in reviewing his report card, she had always been assured by him that "F" meant "fine" (Um, personal communication). The sense of disempowement experienced by parents is matched only by the psychological pressure on the individual child as the demands of the responsibilities far exceed the maturity needed to deal with them. This "loss of innocence" contributes to the complexity of the adjustment process of refugee children.

The redistribution of roles and responsibilities necessarily entails significant implications for intrafamilial relations. Unfamiliar with the laws and norms regarding discipline, refugee parents often yield to extremism, either resorting to drastic corporal punishment or absolute hands-off approach. The predicament and frustration articulated in this comment are felt by many parents. "The schools do not teach our children to behave. They told us to talk to our children. When we talk to the children, they don't listen. When we try to discipline them at home, the police come. When we don't and they are on the streets, we, as parents, are blamed. I just don't understand. What can parents do?" (Um, 1991 personal communication). As a consequence, many have come to feel that they had survived the Pol Pot period only to lose their children to the way of the new society or worst, to the streets of inner-city America.

In short, it can be said that traditional the Khmer social system has been critically altered by the forces of history and circumstance. Over the span of the last 20 years, traditional roles, relations, and hierarchy have been redefined in critical ways. In many family contexts, filiarchy is emerging as a new feature of power relations. The significance is not only in the nature of change, but in the pace with which it has come. The changes that have impacted the Cambodian people have concentrated within the last two decades. This has precluded the possibility of a stable transition through evolutionary emergence of new institutions, norms, and mores. It can be argued that no community could withstand the pressure of such transformative and rapid change without a sense of disorientation and dislocation.

DESTABILIZATION OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

"Pure Khmer culture," it has been said, "the civilization that build Ankor Wat will not survive this generation." This statement encapsulates much of the fear of the Cambodian refugee community that, as a result of developments of the last two decades, Khmer culture has been irreversibly affected in fundamental ways. Language, a principal repository of culture and national ethos, was "revolutionized" during the Pol Pot era. Religion was outlawed and temple grounds desecrated, some turned into prisons and torture centers. Monks were killed or forcefully defrocked. For a society that is founded on oral tradition, the process of cultural transmission was severely disrupted and, in many instances, severed by the loss of one million out of seven million lives and the displacement of another million to foreign lands—an unfathomable degree of dislocation. A whole new generation of Cambodians, both in Cambodia and in the U.S., are growing up divested of the richness of their cultural tradition.

It must be recognized, however, that in the face of tremendous adversity, the refugee community has also demonstrated undeniable resiliency. Despite the U.S. government's policy of dispersal, an ethnic community has been re-established through secondary and tertiary migration. Ethnic-based mutual assistance associations and Buddhist temples have struggled to reconstitute and to provide venues for communal reintegration. The viability of these institutions must be viewed as an expression of the community's commitment to cultural preservation. Where schools and the external community do not endorse primary language acquisition, weekend classes at Buddhist temples provide instruction in Khmer language, writing, and culture. For a community often fragmented by class, gender, and ideology, these centers generate the much needed structural and spiritual reinforcement, enabling the articulation of fundamental aspects of "Khmerness."

PSYCHICAL DESTABILIZATION

The fluidity that seems to characterize the Cambodian refugee community is essentially rooted in the fact that most of the cultural and normative "signposts" have been altered fundamentally or lost altogether, and new cultural institutions and norms have yet to be created and legitimated. "Being a refugee," as Dr. Hans Wicker points out, "means being engaged in a kind of lifelong psychological balancing act." (Wicker and Schoch, 1987). While migration, in general, necessarily entails some degree of uprootedness, the nature and process of forced migration which define the refugee phenomenon reflects a level of structural and psychical dislocation that is not replicated in any other context. Because of unique historical experiences, trauma and other by-products of extreme danger and privation are the distinguishing features of the Cambodian refugee community. Studies of Southeast Asian refugees have shown that in comparison with other refugee groups, Cambodians have been subjected to a higher degree of exposure to violence and dislocation, and longer periods of confinement in refugee camps (Meinhardt, Tom, Tse and Yu, 1985–1986). Given the context of flight—of abruptness and secrecy—many refugees are plagued by the sense of "unresolved business." It has been reported that the average refugee family had 24 hours to prepare for escape. The Khmer Rouge policy of fragmenting families into distinct and often mobile work teams often meant that family member did not have the opportunity to escape together. The sense of closure is also denied by the many disappearances and mass executions under the Khmer Rouge regime. Pre-resettlement trauma is further compounded by post-resettlement experiences of linguistic isolation, endemic poverty, inner-city violence, and racism. As a consequence, the community as a whole reflects a higher percentage of people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If inferences can be drawn from existing literature on children of the survivors of the Jewish holocaust, the ramifications of trauma can be said to be deep-seated and generational. Findings from the San Diego study have already established a correlation between maternal emotional stability and children's school performance (Rumbaut and Ima, 1987).

IMPLICATIONS

Pre-migration history and experiences directly impact the adjustment of refugees and their families. Given the combination of structural, cultural, and psychical dislocation, refugee students and their families have particular needs and concerns that are not shared by other immigrant communities. The conventional expectations that educational institutions may have regarding academic preparedness and "school readiness" must be modified to account for the particularities of the refugee experience. Accurate and complete documentation is not always available given the multiple stages of dislocation, in the same manner that evasiveness about biographical information may be reflective of the inculcated culture of fear and secrecy. Informal adoption, camp marriages and other familial arrangements that often go undocumented, compound the complexity of family structure. Years of educational disruption also meant delayed cognitive development. Unfamiliarity with the concept of calendars or the inability to tell time do not necessarily indicate learning disabilities, but may result from experiences under the Khmer Rouge where the rhythm of life was dictated not by the mechanical ticking of a clock, but by the rising and setting of the sun.

Having been immersed in a world of uncertainty, refugee students and their families often continue in a state of limbo, where neither the unburdening of the past nor the transition into a normal future is ever quite achieved. The legacy of fear and distrust of the Pol Pot years has resulted in a noted degree of passivity among Cambodian refugee students, which Kinzie has termed the "concentration camp syndrome" (Kinzie, 1987). In comparison with other refugee groups, Cambodian youth have been found to manifest little or no confidence in themselves and an inability to project aspirations for the future (Bazerman et al.; Ima and Rumbaut, 1987). When confronted with social and academic adversity, students have resorted to "expressive withdrawal" (Rumbaut and Ima, 1987). Often without indications of disruptive behavior at school, they would simply drop out of the system.

The literature on school performance consistently points to familial support as a critical component of educational achievement (Flaxman and Inger, 1991). Like their children, Cambodian parents are often reluctant to question authority and assume that their traditional concept of "education"—the encompassing process of academic, social, physical, and spiritual nurturance—is also applied in the American public schools. Furthermore, refugee parents are burdened by the multiple challenges of adjustment to life in a new society and the struggle to make ends meet. Unfamiliarity with the American educational system, combined with the intimidating aspects of many schools, undermines their ability to be more actively involved in the school community. This does not mean they are not involved in their children's education; it does means that notions of "support" and "involvement" are culturally defined and understood. While passivity of Southeast refugee parents is often misinterpreted as disinterest or disregard for their children's academic performance, research clearly demonstrates the commitment of refugee parents to educational achievement, in some cases, even superseding that of mainstream European American parents (Bempechat et al., 1989).

Given the particularities of the refugee experience, the following observations can help to promote effective teaching and schooling of Southeast Asian youth:

1. In dealing with refugee students and their families, educators must begin with a reassessment of their own assumptions and expectations.
2. There must be flexibility in pedagogical methods and willingness to accommodate variations in learning styles, educational experiences, and psycho-social development.
3. Validation of history and culture must be an integrated component of the curriculum. It can not stop at the mere promotion of cultural awareness through the celebration of foods and festivals.
4. Schooling experience necessarily goes beyond the provision of academic instruction. True education aims at the development of the whole child. Hence, the process of teaching and schooling must be guided by efforts at minimizing the dissonance between the home culture and the school culture. A comprehensive approach to development necessarily entails collaboration with other institutions and agents, hence, the importance of being familiar with available resources beyond the schools.
5. As part of the effort to create a safe learning environment, schooling experiences should not contribute to the disorientation that has already characterized the life experiences of refugee students.
6. Understanding refugee communities must begin with recognition of the tremendous diversity in background, experiences, and needs among different refugee groups. Informational handbooks, community profiles, and resource guides are best used as tools to gather information about refugee students, their families, and communities.
7. School personnel must remain cognizant of the fact that many of the challenges facing refugee students are "beyond academic," and that what appears to be a learning disorder may, in fact, be rooted in a host of other factors. Historical and personal experiences have critical impact upon the education and learning process of refugee students.

FILIPINO AMERICAN EXPERIENCES

BY JOAN MAY T. CORDOVA, FRED CORDOVA, AND DOROTHY L. CORDOVA

Filipino Americans now comprise one of the fastest growing groups in the United States. While the 1990 census reported a Filipino American population of more than 1.4 million, more recent statistics show Filipinos to have the highest immigration rate of all Asian groups (Hodgkinson and Obarakpor, 1994).

Despite a growing population, a history of Filipino presence in the United States dating back to 1587 (Crouchett, 1982), and permanent settlements in Louisiana in 1763 (Espina, 1988), research related to the education of Filipinos and Filipino Americans remains limited. In *Uprooting Racism* (1996), Paul Kivel writes: "We know little at all about Filipino culture, even though Filipinos are one of the oldest and largest Asian-American communities, and the United States occupied the Philippines as a colony for many years."

Generations of Filipino American students have endured the consequences of U.S. society "not knowing" about the Philippines and Filipino Americans. Textbooks used in U.S. schools seldom, if ever, mention Filipinos or Filipino Americans. Most Filipino American youth from throughout the United States recall never having studied anything by or about Filipinos in school; many have never been taught by a Filipino teacher. Although the Filipino school-aged population has demonstrated steady growth in California, for example, Filipino teachers still comprise less than one percent of teachers in California public schools.

Teachers and other professionals who work with Filipino American students and their parents must begin to learn more about the context of their students' lives. This chapter will present basic guidelines for working with Filipino American students while citing useful resources for teachers and others interested in Filipino Americans.

SOME GUIDELINES

Teachers must challenge educational reports grounded in deficit assumptions such as, "When a child does not achieve in school, it is the child who has a problem."

Since the mid-nineteenth century, a major goal of U.S. public education has been to "Americanize" immigrant students by distancing them from their home culture and language. Hence, any student who differed from a standard norm was viewed as deficient. Despite the fact that leading educators (Cummins, 1994; Nieto, 1992; et al.) have recently documented the symbolic violence of such practices, the legacy of deficit assumptions persists. Teachers, community leaders, parents, and students must continue to find ways to challenge ideas and practices that view Filipino and other students as deficient.

The 1996 edition of *Social Process in Hawaii*, organized around the theme of "Filipino American History, Identity, and Community in Hawaii," documents one example of challenging deficit assumptions. In "The Education of Filipinos in Hawaii," Dr. Amefil Agbayani cites a Hawaii Department of Education report that identified the following four problems facing Filipino immigrant school children: English language deficiencies; difficulty in socializing with local students; lack of relevant schooling; difficulty in understanding the value system of American society.

Rather than accepting these issues as problems of the Filipino child, Agbayani reframes these concerns in ways that promote partnerships between educational institutions, students, and the community. With this shift in focus, the issues become: lack of appreciation of the language of the immigrant child; lack of bilingual teaching staff; the lack of relevant curriculum; and difficulty in understanding the value system of the child. Recognizing how thinking may be influenced by biased, deficit assumptions, then reframing issues so that the Filipino student is no longer simply "the problem" are critical first steps in problem solving and potential partnership building.

Teachers need to be aware of the great range of diversity in Filipino American experiences.

Immigrant. Second, third, fourth—perhaps even tenth generation—born in the U.S. Of mixed heritage. Urban, rural. The list of factors influencing Filipino American student experiences may seem endless.

Dr. Penelope V. Flores, editor of *The Journal of the American Association for Philippine Psychology*, states that "cultural dimensions such as family, region, and social class, when applied to Filipinos in America, actually are gross oversimplifications." In her article "Philippine American Youth Between Two Expectations: Filipino and U.S. Parenting Standards," Flores uses empirical research to illustrate how complex layers of variables of Filipinos in the United States—including socioeconomic origins and multilingual background in the Philippines—influence traditional Philippine parenting styles and the subsequent cultural dissonance Filipino American students experience in American schools.

Teachers must avoid generalizations or simple answers about how best to work with Filipino American students. To know Filipino Americans, teachers need to refer to authentic narratives of Filipino American educational experience.

Authentic narratives reveal history, experiences, feelings, relationships, values, and cultures that should be read in light of the specific sociohistorical context from which each is written. For example, the narrative below by Fred Cordova is written from the perspective of a second-generation Filipino American parent and grandparent, born and reared in the U.S., who has spent many years as a researcher, advocate, and organizer in Filipino American communities of the United States.

AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE

"I am an American of Filipino ancestry, therefore a Filipino American—a Pinoy as my parents and their peers had proudly called themselves as early as 70 years ago in these United States.

"At times, as a second-generation Pinoy who tries to make it in the American mainstream, I am torn between two legacies because I was born into a cohesive Filipino American community which has a strong sense of belonging to a unique group sharing a certain set of values—values which cannot be socially engineered into the white majority society. Those values originated from an archipelago, peopled by Filipinos, today numbering some 63 million and speaking 87 different languages and dialects.

"I share with you this significant Philippine relevance because in order to promote Filipino American history as well as pride, we must not forget the historical ties with the Philippines. However, neither must we remain there as do many of our brothers and sisters in their search for their American ethnic identity. If we have chosen America, and to live as Filipino Americans, we must leave those islands and cross the Pacific—across those "Oceans of Dreams"—and rediscover America before we can appreciate our historical and cultural legacies in the United States, and before we can uplift and advance our community.

"The capstone to our own heritage as Americans of Philippine ancestry is rooted in our Filipino American Experience, beginning 407 years ago on October 18, 1587 in Morro Bay near San Luis Obispo in California...in the Bayous of Louisiana as early as 1763.

"History, then, and the pursuit of it, becomes more important in the search for our identity as Filipino American—those born in the United States, as I am a native Californian. The story of Second Generation, born in the 1920s and 1930s, is not unique. It had been duplicated in many parts of this country—in city ghettos set aside for emerging immigrants or racial minorities, and in countless rural communities. Yet, it is a story many do not know. The Filipino American community I grew up in during the thirties and forties consisted of different layers of people who came from the Philippines to the United States at different times for different reasons. When my parents and their peers came to the U.S. before World War II, they were different from other immigrants from Asia, Europe, Latin America, and Africa who were classified as aliens.

"Unlike any other country in Asia, the Philippines has been bound to America: first, through 232 years of ensuing Philippine immigration and American births, beginning with the first wave of Filipino Immigration to the U.S. in 1763, establishing the first permanent Filipino American settlement in the continental United States; second, by the period of U.S. colonization of the Philippines beginning in 1898; third, by the tragedy of World War II with the devastation of the Philippines and the deaths of thousands because of loyalty to the U.S.; fourth, by almost a century of American western traditions and values imposed on the Philippines and its peoples.

"Contrary to popular notions of single, male, itinerant, illiterate beginnings, Filipino American history shows viable Pinoy communities throughout the U.S. since the settlement of the Louisiana "Manilamen," followed by women, children, families, organizations, churches, newspapers, labor unions and a community life, always in a state of acculturation. This was my 'growing up brown.'

"In more than one sense, growing up in our community made my 'bridge generation'—the second generation American-born coming into this world before

World War II—part of this acculturation process. We were steeped in the smell and taste and sight and sound of where we all came from, where we were born, and when we belonged. But the schools would have no part of that. We were to be Americans—solely English-speaking and unapologetically Anglo/Eurocentric. We were systematically being shed of our acculturation in order to be assimilated into the great America society.

"To this day, we have never been quite white enough among majority Americans and never brown enough among the new Filipino immigrants. But we persevered because we had each other. We had a community. We were never alone.

"Historically, the sociological development of America's ethnic groups began initially with education before economic power, before political strength, before societal influence, before achievement. If the basis for upward mobility is education, then we require quality education that is historically comprehensive and culturally sensitive to help our students prepare for careers in the marketplace, and for survival in the mainstream of society.

"In 232 years of Filipino presence in the U.S., contributions by Pinoys, although not as dramatic as other ethnic groups, are innumerable through the sweat and pain particularly of first generation Filipino Americans in fields, orchards, canneries, plantations, kitchens, hotels, the Navy, merchant ships, the bandstand, the ring, and other places to establish a legacy of an honorable work ethic steeped in production and pride.

"Actually, education was the primary goal of many of these nationals of a new era, marking the second wave of Filipino immigration to the U.S., which stretched from 1906 to 1934. Despite hard times compounded by the Great Depression, they still managed to be generous, honorable, proud, and to celebrate life with laughter, music, and dance. The same traits can be found among those who have arrived from the Philippines in the third wave of immigration from 1945 to 1965 and in the fourth wave from 1965 through this day.

"Reach out to these new Philippine arrivals, the "bagong dating," and to their children in high school and college—those who search but cannot find their American inheritance, those who did not realize the struggles of our first generation pioneers and their children of the second generation, those who do not know our Filipino American history—and help sensitize and educate them by sharing with them the story of the triumph of the Pinoy spirit. This is not a matter of being politically correct. Rather, this is a matter of sociological, cultural, and spiritual urgency.

"Today, Filipino Americans are a majority within a minority within a minority. But like it or not, racism in the United States—whether overt or covert, blatant or subtle—is alive and well. Our nation—the United States of America to which we owe allegiance and in which we share one commonality, that is, the privileged nationality of being Americans—this land of ours is facing troubled times, bordering on an identity crisis.

"There were also days in the 1920s and 1930s when the pioneering first-generation Filipino nationals were called "brown monkeys' and hotel and restaurant signs read: "No Filipinos Allowed;" when our pioneering nationals were denied citizenship, voting privileges, property rights, good jobs, decent housing because there were no powerful forces to protect them—even from their own native land which still was a colony of the United States; when the annual quota of Filipinos entering the U.S. was set in 1934 to 50 a year—smaller than Luxembourg and Monaco—even though the American flag still flew over the Philippines; when as late as 1948, it was still illegal in many states for whites to marry anyone who was not white—Filipinos included. I still remember what I thought were the "good old days."

"My Philippine legacy tells me a positive message in another language: "puso"—heart; "awa"—compassion; "utang ng loob—obligation. The Filipino American experience is a continuing struggle—not only to dispel ignorance and negative attitudes—but to be recognized by the majority society, and all the while give strength and pride to those young and brave. Throughout this nation, it seems too many adults fail to recognize that there are many social problems among our young people—their identity crisis, their gangs, their violence, their high college dropout rate, their premarital teen pregnancies, their underachievement, their lack of self-esteem.

"Filipino parents, particularly those in the middle class, are sometimes in self-denial about issues facing their children. With references to gangs, a parent might respond, "Not my children. My boy's a good boy." Some parents may place total confidence in the school. My mother used to say, "If he needs spanking, you give it." She, like others, had confidence that teachers would do their job. Many Filipino parents have second jobs or work two or three shifts. Although sociologists need to do more definitive studies, I believe that the statistics reporting relatively high household incomes for Filipinos do not account for how everyone, even the Lolos and Lolas (grandparents), may be pooling their resources.

"Filipino Americans need more community leaders with integrity, strength, and compassion. Our history has shown how important it is to support and work with other leaders of vision, of public spirit, of influence to build a better community and provide encouragement and support to those who—by doing well for all of us—give us honor and respectability in society-at-large. However, one cannot do it alone. One has to have patience and humility in accepting and sharing leadership with others who are also dedicated and capable to attain the common good for the community and for our people."

HMONG HISTORY AND CULTURE

BY SOUA K. YANG

Approximately 5,000 years ago the ancestors of the Hmong lived along the lower reaches of the Yellow (Huang Ho) River in China. They lived in remote areas far from civilization in order to preserve peace and freedom, but very often their lives were disturbed by wars which forced them to take sides to defend their homes and families. Wars and persecutions brought about by other ethnic groups forced the Hmong to flee their homeland southward to Southeast Asia. Their dispersion resulted in hardship, changes, starvation, and death. Now the Hmong no longer speak the same dialect, wear the same clothing, or share the same way of life. They have adapted to different living environments and engaged in different types of farming.

Today there are about ten million Hmong; the majority of them live in China; the rest are scattered in the northern regions of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma. Others have resettled as refugees in France, Canada, Australia, and the United States. Those Hmong who now live in the United States come from the mountainous regions of Laos. They can be distinguished from ethnic Laotians by their family names. Hmong "last" names are almost always one syllable, whereas Lao names are usually polysyllabic.

THE HMONG FAMILY

Originally, Hmong people practiced animism, ancestor spiritual worship, and shamanism, a practice in which powerful spirits can be influenced by special leaders called shamans. Illness can be caused when a person's soul strays or is stolen. A shaman can heal by restoring the soul back to the body. Hmong believe that all living things have souls which return to an afterworld when they die. There they await reincarnation. Although many Hmong become Christian, many retain the spiritual practices of ancestors which have been in existence for centuries.

The Hmong family structure follows the clan system, a governing foundation for Hmong values and identity that provides security for its members and a natural path toward self-sufficiency. The clan designation or "Xeem" have become Hmong people's last name in American society. There are 22 clans, but only 14 are well known: Chang, Hang, Her, Khang, Kong, Kue, Lee, Lor, Moua, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang. The Hmong hold to the patrilineal clan system in which at birth a child becomes a member of his or her father's clan. All members of the clan identify themselves with both their clan name and their given name. Women marrying into a different clan retain their birth clan name.

Just as the Hmong attach great importance to society as a whole, so do they value the extended family. In such a family, grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles, and grandchildren live in the same household. They are interdependent. When a family member becomes successful, everyone in the family shares in the recognition and respect. Similarly, if a member of the family mishandles an affair, the burden and dishonor affects not just the individual, but also the whole family. Hmong act as a group rather than as individuals. The harmony of the family is maintained through use of the kinship name. Instead of calling a member of the family by the first name, the kinship name of aunt, uncle, nephew, niece, brother, or sister is encouraged. In this way, people are appropriately addressed with respect.

Clan leaders play a very important role in Hmong society. The clan leader has the final word for his clan members. The head of the household's word is final for his family. The roles of family members are defined by their birth order as well as by their ability to contribute to the survival of the family. A husband's duty involves family leadership and the provision for the physical and spiritual welfare of his family. He handles all of his family's affairs. He is the one who deals with the outside world. He makes most of the major decisions for his family, then shares the decisions with his wife and children.

TRANSITION TO AMERICA

As early as the 1950s, the Hmong took part in the Indochina War. They fought against the communist expansion in Indochina. Most Hmong adults were involved in the "secret war" in Laos. "These small, smart mountain tribesmen of Laos were loyal and effective allies of the U.S. during the Vietnam War" (James L. Tyson, 1992). Because of their association with the U.S. during the Vietnam War, they fled to neighboring Thailand to escape persecution after the takeover of Laos by the Communist Pathet Lao in 1975.

In May of 1975, the first groups of Hmong refugees arrived in Thailand. Life in the refugee camps was very hard. For the first time in their history, Hmong had to get in line for food. The crowded conditions and the insufficiency of food in the camp created many problems. There was poor sanitation as well as limited water and medical supplies. The Hmong refugees could do nothing to help themselves. They could not obtain education or acquire work skills in the refugee camps. They didn't want to return to Laos because of political persecution. The hardship of life in the camps forced Hmong refugees to choose a third country of asylum.

Beginning in mid-1976, large numbers of Hmong refugee immigrants entered the United States. Their first obstacles were the language barrier and social adjustment problems. As a result, the Hmong now say: they have a mouth but cannot communicate; they have two ears but cannot understand; they see many wonderful things and cry. They can no longer farm or raise livestock as they used to in their homeland. The change is so great that they find themselves being caught between two worlds: agricultural and technological.

It is difficult to overstate the cultural shock experienced by the Hmong resettling in the United States. With horrible memories of war and flight, they left behind squalid refugee camps to begin new lives in a highly industrialized, technologically-driven, consumer society. They faced significant linguistic, educational, economic, cultural, and racial barriers which created confusing, embarrassing, and even frightening situations in their daily lives. Most Hmong had never lived in a house with plumbing and electricity, and had little familiarity with common household appliances.

HMONG FAMILIES AND THE U.S. SCHOOLS

Traditionally, Hmong boys and girls learn their life skills from parents, grandparents, and other significant people. They learn by listening and watching the tasks performed, and by behaviors modeled by adults. By the age of six or seven, boys begin to work closely with their fathers, while girls follow their mothers. The open fireplace in the Hmong house serves as a school for Hmong boys and girls. In the evening, Hmong children sit around the fireplace and listen to stories told by their grandparents. Basically, the stories teach them moral and social values.

In the Hmong village, teachers were highly respected by students as their secondary parents. Hmong parents hardly took any opportunity to meet with their children's teachers and never formed PTAs. Students were taught to listen attentively to their teachers. Whatever the school and teachers said had to be correct. It was unthinkable for parents and students to disagree with the school and teacher.

Because children attend school and acquire the English language faster than adults, Hmong parents rely on their children to translate. The children become parents; parents become children. The authority of the household slips to the child when he or she is not yet capable. The parents don't want this, but they have no choice. Hmong parents have lost hope and see their children lost in a world of entertainment rather than education. They don't know what to do. They face a great deal of intergenerational conflict.

Young people find themselves torn between the desires of elders to preserve culture and the demands of American society to assimilate. Those who came to the United States as infants, or who were born in this country, have a hard time embracing Hmong culture. They play with the same toys and watch the same television shows as their non-Hmong schoolmates. They make comparisons between themselves and their peers.

Without English, Hmong cannot advance in school, find jobs, or perform many routine tasks of daily life. Lack of skills, lack of English, and unfamiliarity with American cultural patterns surrounding work and the work place lead to marginal employment for some adults. Even coming from an agrarian society, however, the Hmong have proven themselves able to contribute to their new society. With personal ambition, societal guidance, and advice, the Hmong will continue to progress and become productive members of their new country.

Language represented the foremost barrier to successful resettlement and education in the United States. The Hmong written language was not developed until 1952. Even then, only a few Hmong had the opportunity to learn the written language because of the war years and subsequent flight from Laos. The Hmong written language is very young and not every Hmong parent in the U.S. is literate in either reading or writing. In addition, the written materials in Hmong are very limited in the U.S. Although Hmong families value education very highly, some parents are not literate in either their native language or English. Because of their reliance on oral communication, Hmong parents often ignore written communications sent home from school.

Many Hmong families see the importance of retaining their native language and culture, and have asked schools many times in the past to make school curriculum more inclusive so that Hmong students can feel good about their culture and heritage. In fact, the Hmong language is probably the last bridge left to connect Hmong elders to the younger generation.

Role models are very important. When Hmong children see Hmong professionals working in their school, they tend to do better in school. Those professionals can understand what Hmong students are going through and facilitate home/school communications, since many Hmong parents rely on oral Hmong language for all communication.

IMPROVING HOME/SCHOOL COMMUNICATION AND UNDERSTANDING

Among the key steps that can be taken to improve home/school communications:

- Knowing that the Hmong rely on oral communication, teachers and school personnel should identify individuals in the community with access to the local Hmong oral network and use them to communicate with parents. Hmong parents need personal contact.
- School staff need to be truthful. If Hmong children are placed two or three grades below where they should be placed, tell the parents. Tell parents what an A grade means. Is it for effort or achievement? On many occasions, parents think their kids received straight As, but when they graduate from high school, they can't go to a four-year state university, but instead only to community college. This is deceitful.
- Parents want to know how to do their best to help their kids succeed in school. Rather than impose on Hmong parents what schools want them to do for their children and the school, schools must utilize parents' existing expertise in a positive way, not by patronizing them. For example, many Hmong can do storytelling in Hmong, can do crafts, and can chaperone children on a field trip.
- Like many other Southeast Asian parents, Hmong parents don't feel they belong in the U.S. Until they can be made to feel they are an equal part of the community, they will not feel comfortable and fully engage in school.
- More Hmong professional and support staff are needed. In so many instances, schools have large number of Hmong students, but there are very few (sometimes none) Hmong professionals employed in the schools. While it may be difficult to find Hmong professionals who have the credentials to work in education, it's not impossible. Where there is a will, there is a way.

It's very important to involve Hmong parents in a meaningful way in school, not just use them to do the school's job. To get them involved at decision-making levels, they must be given the skills required to do the job. Building equal partnership requires equal or similar knowledge.

All parents want the best for their kids, and Hmong parents are no different. Just do not assume that everybody already understands the U.S. culture and school system. The Hmong community is so diverse, it is wrong to make that assumption.

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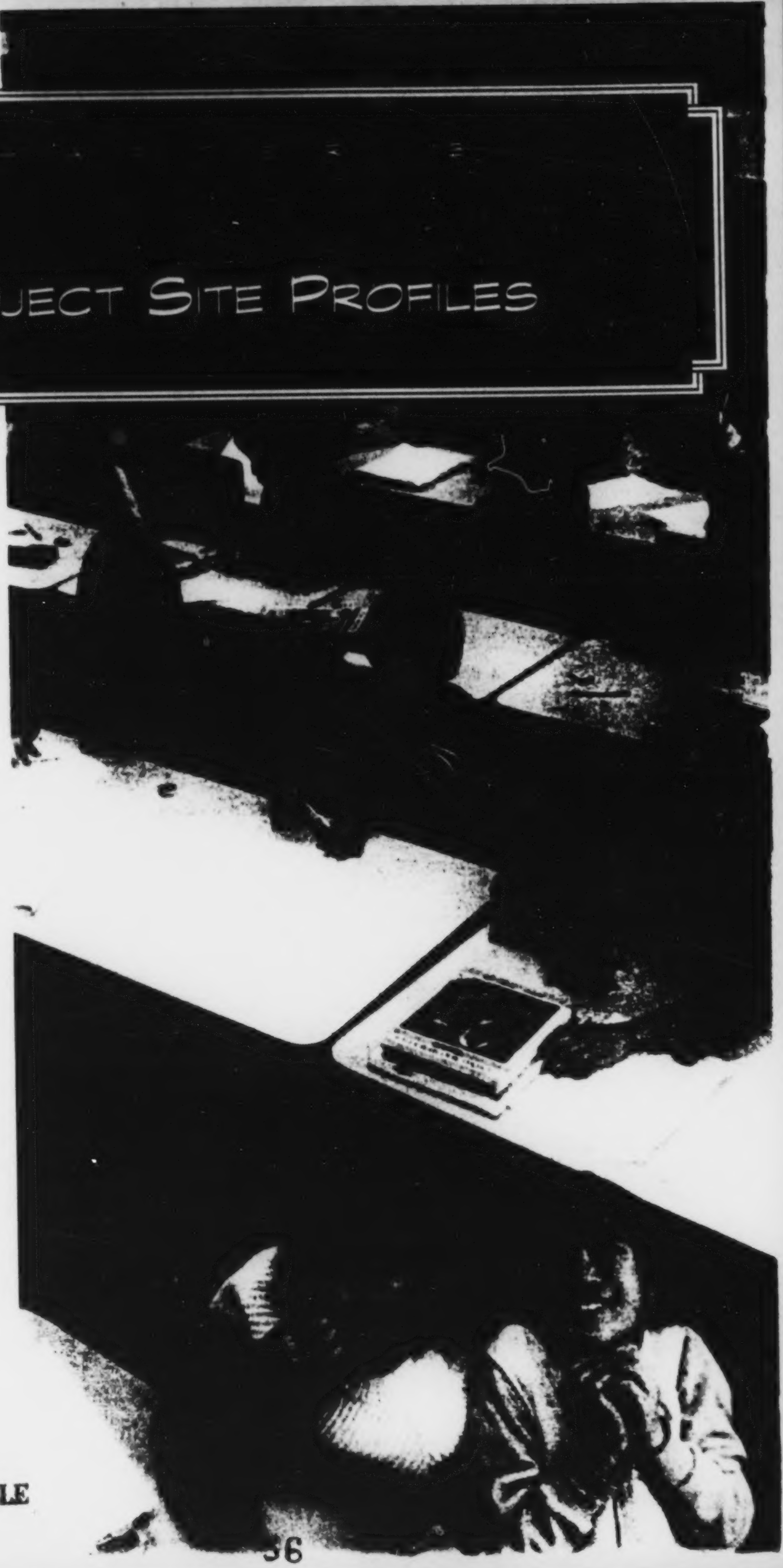
PROJECT SITE PROFILES



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CHICAGO: COMMUNITIES AS PARTNERS

"How can teachers and parents network? How can parents raise their voices with the school for their children?"

VIETNAMESE PARENT
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Throughout the turbulent history of Southeast Asia, the people of Vietnam and Cambodia have been traditional adversaries. Yet, during the project, partnership building occurred not only between families and schools, but between Chicago Vietnamese and Cambodian communities as well.

Building on mutually respectful relationships previously established by Vietnamese and Cambodian community leaders in Chicago, growing numbers of community members worked to create family/school partner-ships. Together, they identified issues of common concern. Vietnamese and Cambodian community members planned workshops, training events, and conferences. Together, they advocated for programs and practices to support the education of all children.

In Chicago today, collaboratively planned events reflect NAFSPP's success in creating partnerships between Cambodian and Vietnamese American communities. The Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI), the Vietnamese Association of Illinois (VAI), McCutcheon Elementary School, and Theodore Roosevelt High School are now involved in partnership building.

Three organizations—the National Asian Family/School Partnership Project (NAFSPP), the Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI), and the Vietnamese Association of Illinois (VAI)—co-sponsored two retreats involving more than 200 parents, community leaders, students, mainstream teachers, and school administrators. After their "Partnership Project Kick-off" event, one community leader commented, "Parents really listened and felt very excited about the whole project and their responsibilities."

NCAS site consultant Hiep Chu noted, "The two conference retreats were well attended by both Vietnamese and Cambodian parents. They became more supportive of each other. Some of the issues, we have to take on as Asians or Southeast Asians, rather than Cambodian or Vietnamese."

Chu met with Dr. The Dao and a core group of Vietnamese teachers and parents at the Vietnamese Association of Illinois to begin forming the Vietnamese Parents Association. He also contacted Samkhann Khoeun, a Cambodian community organizer from the Cambodian Association of Illinois, who supported the idea of

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forming a Cambodian Parents Association. Both groups continue their advocacy work.

Describing his interactions with the two communities, Chu, a Vietnamese American, says, "I listened to the needs of the community and parents in order to learn ways to best work with parents. One project goal is reminding parents at all workshops that we have to invest into our children because they will be the next generation of leaders."

Noting the difficulty of organizing large community meetings that included representatives from CAI, VAI, McCutcheon Elementary School, and Roosevelt High School, leaders remained sensitive to the ways in which the choice of meeting site influenced community participation. All involved worked to achieve a balance between holding planning meetings in schools and in Cambodian or Vietnamese community settings.

STRATEGIES FOR PARTNERSHIPS

With prior experience as the executive director of Boston's Vietnamese American Civic Association, Chu now serves as coordinator of the Institute of Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Boston Harbor campus. He believes in the value of building community coalitions. Reflecting on effective strategies used throughout the challenging process of building family/school partnerships while bridging two distinct communities, Chu describes the formation of "layers of partnerships."

> **"It's important to identify a small, core group of people—including community members (not necessarily executive directors of community based organizations), teachers, and parents. First, build up a small, committed core of people in the community, and have that group lead. Then go into schools as a coalition. Have the leadership group be the bridge to the schools. Parents might feel reluctant to go in. That's really a model that will work with the Vietnamese, especially when they feel that the school has the authority.**
>
> **"There are two reasons why we did this coalition. First, there are so many factions within the community, we need to sit down as a smaller group. Second, we see schools as having more authority; as a group we have to go to advocate rather than expect schools to reach out or down."**

The core group, in this case a Southeast Asian coalition, becomes the first layer of the partnership. Unlike academic definitions of family/school partnership that assume mutuality, shared responsibility, and decision making, Chu's concept and experiences with actual Asian American communities are framed by the realities of historically unequal and hierarchical relationships of power and authority. The first layer, the actual Asian American coalition, must often struggle against school practices shaped by institutional racism. From experience, Chu knows the struggles of those who choose to be involved in such coalitions:

> **"This core group of people, they take a lot of heat from their own communities. Criticism from other groups...for not joining or working with them. But they know their ground and battles to fight. They know what benefits students and parents."**

The second layer of the partnership forms when schools reach out and are open to working with the Asian community. A larger partnership develops. Yet Chu is aware that when establishing the second layer of partnership: "If the school does not reach out, the first layer of partnership will advocate for services."

From the beginning of the NAFSPP Project in Chicago, schools did reach out. Chu describes how school support grew as partnerships developed.

> **"School staff picked up a lot of knowledge through the conferences and meetings. Some became closer to the Asian community and even intend to reach out more. They're willing to meet at community-based organizations. Some schools have an open policy to allow outside people, community programs, parents to come in to help improve the students' education.**
>
> **"It's critical for the first layer to form itself as a coalition. This is why: generating from a small group of people with common ground and moving out over the years—no one can break them down."**

CONTEXT

Working with a large, urban public school district in Chicago posed considerable challenges. Operating with a deficit budget early in the fall semester, the legal system delayed decisions about whether to have schools remain open or closed. By January of 1994, the school system maintained a balanced budget by borrowing money. One high school principal expressed concern for the quality of education in Chicago during this budget crisis.

Roosevelt High School Student Demographics (1994—95)

50% Hispanic
21% Asian (mostly Vietnamese
17% African American
12% White

McCutcheon Elementary School Student Demographics (1994-95)

45% Asian
40% African American
10% Hispanic
5% Other

In 1992, with more than 10,000 Vietnamese residing in the state of Illinois, the Vietnamese Association of Illinois administered five programs offering services related to employment, adjustment, youth, community economic development, and seniors. That year, VAI assisted hundreds of community members to become permanent residents and citizens by hosting citizenship classes and interviews. VAI also registers voters and offers bilingual literature on the electoral process.

The Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI) reported that nearly 5,000 Cambodians make their homes in the Uptown and Albany Park neighborhoods in Chicago. CAI remains the only service provider in the Chicago metropolitan area that provides culturally appropriate, bilingual programming to address the needs of the Cambodian refugee population. Established in 1976, CAI has placed Cambodians in jobs, provided home-based literacy tutoring, worked with senior refugees, and provided tutoring at all levels of education. Chhengloan Lim, CAI Board President, outlined CAI's vision:

> **"I hope to see the creation of a Cambodian library with materials on Cambodian culture and history so that we may again take pride in our heritage. I hope to see the establishment of a much needed leadership development program because of the loss of leadership during the reign of the Khmer Rouge. I hope for a parenting program so that parents in our community may apply the traditional parenting skills they used in Cambodia to their new roles as Cambodian American parents."**

Kompha Seth, executive director of CAI, described how Cambodian high school students cut classes without the knowledge of either parents or teachers: "When they cut classes, they will hang around on the street, video game store, drinking, and in some cases see adult movies." Seth believes that parent-student communication is a key issue: "When children cut classes and parents don't know what to do, in most cases, parents cannot communicate to the teachers and to the students at home. The situation gets worse and worse. In some cases, the children run away."

Pheap Chhorm, intergenerational counselor at CAI, adds, "By the time parents find out from the teachers, they have a difficult time understanding and communicating with teachers. When their children get involved in illegal activities, parents must then deal with the police."

Kompha Seth points out that parents need organizing skills in order to work with other parents, schools, and teachers: "We need more leaders and we do not have enough leaders." Seth recommended that the Cambodian community have speakers and workshops on how parents can help themselves to help their children—basic skills development to help them deal with family problems as well as how to have parents and members of community care about their community: "How do we care for the neighborhood when we see a gang active in the neighborhood? Or when a streetlight is broken, how do we get the community to fix it? We have to get people interested in community issues as their own."

PARENTS' VOICES

"As you enter the working world, we ask you to help reach your hands to the people who are less fortunate within our community whenever you can. If your demanding time does not permit you to help other families, you can help improve our community image by first helping your own family members such as brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, and cousins. You should try to guide them so that they, too, can obtain a high school diploma and then a college degree."

Parent and Community Leader

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Phung Vo, a McCutcheon School counselor, found the value of NAFSPP to be "a chance to work with parents and teachers by holding the conference, the workshops, and the counseling workshops." He especially valued the opportunity for parents to voice their concerns about education. According to Vo, the question most commonly asked by Vietnamese parents was, "How can we keep students in school and avoid the problems of society?"

During separate NAFSPP meetings, Vietnamese and Cambodian bilingual teachers and community members cited issues of English language, culture, education, and lack of time as reasons why many parents were not active in their children's education. Yet all seemed to feel, "It is a must to include parents." One parent spoke of the need for providing more education and information services to the Cambodian community, saying, "When they understand the issues, they will be involved."

When Vietnamese and Cambodian teachers and parents met together, they made a comprehensive list of their concerns:

1. Breakup of families; self-identity; dropouts; communication between parents and children.
2. Need for bilingual teachers and aides.
3. Children caught between two cultures.
4. Peer pressure.
5. Parents' lack of education and time.
6. Lack of respect between children and parents.
7. Lack of commitment from school.
8. Insufficient funding.
9. Parents' lack of knowledge.
10. Lack of role models from the community.
11. Lack of understanding of American school system.
12. Lack of involvement of parents in schools.
13. Safety of school and neighborhood.
14. Stereotyping Asians as successful.
15. Parents' limited English.
16. Poor communication between parents and bilingual school staff.
17. Lack of self-esteem.
18. Family relocation causing disruption in education.
19. Youth gangs.

Parents, teachers, community leaders, and other school staff reviewed these issues as they collaboratively developed a work plan to build partnerships between the school, community, and parents.

CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING PARTNERSHIPS

A meeting with Cambodian parents generated numerous insights into the ways in which culture shapes attitudes and behavior. One parent told the gathering:

> **"In Cambodia, once children were registered in schools, everything was taken care of by the teachers. As the parents, brothers and sisters, we had no right**

> **to interfere in the system regarding our children's education at all. The educational system in this country requires the parents, the associations, and the students themselves to participate.**
>
> **"In Cambodia, parents strongly participated in educating their children at home, as well as at schools and temples—which used to be cultural and educational centers for the Khmer people. They performed a very big job at home, encouraging children to study, providing clothes and good food to keep them healthy, and sometimes, bragging about children if they do well in school."**

A young man who spoke up at the Cambodian parents' meeting commented:

> **"Parents got used to the norm of having little involvement in their children's education when they reach school age or when they are already in schools. All educational aspects, they used to believe, are up to the teachers or the educational system to decide. Parents have no part in teaching their kids academically. However, they do teach their kids about family values, morality, and manners. And they think that the educational system in this country is doing the same thing. Then, they blame the kids for not studying hard enough and they think that is the reason why children don't perform well in school."**

Other discussions generated further insights:

> **"At home, parents want kids to behave the Cambodian way: be gentle, obedient, hard working, respect the elderly, older siblings, and so on. Sometimes, they feel that it is too much pressure for them. They cannot handle it. Not much time is being spent together. And there is constant pressure from these local gangs every day. Soon, kids hang around with the bad guys. And by the time the parents know this, it is almost too late."**

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

In October 1993, the NAFSPP site consultant met with Cambodian parents and staff at the Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI) for an informal workshop. Assisted by a translator, the consultant discussed the importance of having an education in the U.S., parental involvement in schools, parents' rights, and students' right to an equal education in public schools. He also met with Cambodian bilingual teachers and community members, and Vietnamese bilingual teachers and community members. At each meeting, in addition to discussing how and why Asian parents might be involved in schools, each group explored possibilities for forming Asian Parent/Teacher Organizations.

In response to recommendations by the Cambodian community, CAI sponsored a workshop for parents conducted in the Khmer language. Following that workshop, NAFSPP sponsored the first joint meeting for Cambodian and Vietnamese bilingual school staff and community members. Thirty-five parents, teachers, and staff attended the session, deciding to hold bi-monthly meetings. Traditional western celebrations such as Mother's and Father's Day as well as special days to honor Khmer heroes and patriots were added to the meeting schedule. The Khmer holidays were intended to serve as a foundation to educate both parents and children about the positive aspects of their native culture.

After a great deal of planning, more than 160 people attended the NAFSPP's second retreat. Students, parents, community leaders, teachers, and principals engaged in spirited discussion of how they might serve students better. All presentations and speeches were translated into both Cambodian and Vietnamese languages. Cambodian and Vietnamese students from McCutcheon Elementary School, Vietnamese students from Trumbull Elementary School, and Vietnamese students from Roosevelt High School performed at the event.

EDUCATION BEYOND THE SCHOOL SITE

When Pheap Chhorm, CAI Intergenerational Counselor, referred to his organization's "Sunday School Program" during the NAFSPP National Networking Conference, many automatically assumed the program carried religious meaning. Chhorm clarified this misunderstanding, noting that CAI simply holds this educational program on Sunday. The misperception pointed to the need for all to be open to new cultural meanings amidst dominant images.

Incorporating the Cambodian Parent Council meeting into the CAI Sunday School Program involved more than a month of collaborative planning between event organizers, NAFSPP personnel, Khmer teachers, and several CAI staff members. All agreed on the following: the meeting should be conducted in the native language; the meeting should be held at a convenient location with a comfortable atmosphere for all parents; the Khmer Sunday School Program provided an ideal base for cultural training, teaching, and motivating Cambodian parents, community leaders, and students; finally, the meeting and parent training sessions should be led by Cambodians—teachers, assistant teachers, school personnel, and others—to truly benefit the community.

A parent appreciation ceremony followed the December meeting and training workshop. Samkhann Khoeun commented, "For all the Cambodian parents whose children attended the Khmer Sunday school, it was a very emotional moment when they were presented with flowers by their children along with words thanking them for all the hard work, endurance, caring, and loving they have been giving to their children since the day they were born till they are now grown-up. Tears of joy, caring, and love were among the scenes on that day. Words of advice and encouragement were also passed from parents to children."

Chicago's partnership building process revealed that educational programs organized by Asian community-based organizations can successfully reach and engage Asian parents. Such positive experiences in community sponsored programs underscore the importance of recognizing the value of family/school partnership activities that build on Asian community programs that already have a record of success, such as CAI's Sunday School Program.

The following June, CAI held a Cambodian Forum at which Cambodian community leaders and educators gave presentations on the following themes:

- Youth's responsibility to succeed in school
- Parental responsibilities to assist their children
- Role of teachers in the U.S. and in Cambodia
- What does it take to go to a college or a university?
- What are the benefits of getting a degree from a college or university?

VIETNAMESE PARENTS AND TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

During their retreat, Vietnamese parents and community leaders raised a central question: What degree of involvement do we expect from the parents? Do we expect them to serve on the school committee or do they simply need to understand what's going on at school and with their children's education? To help sort out these concerns, the group formed the Vietnamese Parents Association of Chicago to work directly with the Vietnamese community, local schools, the Chicago School Board of Education, and City Hall.

Soon after its founding, the Vietnamese Parents Association of Chicago sponsored a training event for more than 25 Vietnamese parents. Conducted in Vietnamese by Dr. Ngoc-Diep Nguyen, an educational consultant, the training emphasized the need for parents to work with schools. After outlining the structure of the Chicago school system, Dr. Diep organized parents into groups of five or six to discuss the following questions:

1. What are different ways to get involved with the schools?
2. How might parents feel less shy about being involved with schools?
3. What are the differences between parents' rights in U.S. schools and in Vietnam?
4. What are the differences between the two cultures in school and at home?

By the end of the workshop, all agreed to have the Vietnamese Parents Association (VPA) educate others about Vietnamese students and their needs and to advocate on their behalf. They also decided to inform Chicago City Hall, the Board of Education, and other schools and school district offices about issues raised by the VPA.

By February 1995, the organization changed its name to the Vietnamese Students' Parents Association of Chicago (VSPA) and submitted incorporation papers. VSPA's by-laws stated its purpose: "This organization is formed with the purpose of helping Vietnamese students' parents become more involved in school activities, interact more with other parents, and get proper support from other educational organizations for the benefit of Vietnamese students in Chicago." Underlying the formation of both the Vietnamese and Cambodian Parent/Teacher Association was the goal of creating a structure to continue the work of partnership building even after NAFSPP formally ended.

The newly incorporated Vietnamese Students' Parents Association of Chicago joined with NAFSPP to sponsor the first conference on education even held for the Vietnamese community of Greater Chicago. More than 300 parents, students, and community leaders attended the event.

Dr. Hieu Trung Nguyen, a teacher from Clemente High School, gave a presentation on Vietnamese high school student issues. He spoke of the importance of having an awareness of the "new culture" (American) while maintaining the "old culture" (Vietnamese). Ms. Cuc Thu, a Vietnamese parent from Chicago, described how Vietnamese parents can help their children succeed in school, with an emphasis on the value of parental involvement. Dr. The Trong Dao, an adviser for the Vietnamese Students' Parents Association, discussed the needs of Vietnamese students in Chicago schools.

At the Cambodian Parent Meeting held during NAFSPP's early phase, Cambodian parents felt very comfortable communicating in their native language during the training session because: the tone of the meeting was friendly and non-threatening—a time for sharing information rather than teaching or preaching; there was a common bond between trainers and the audience who shared the same culture, tradition, and values; the trainers themselves were parents who "know what it is like being a parent in this modern society"; the purpose of the meeting was clear—to help adults help children to do better in school.

Sovalee Mao, a teacher at the McCutcheon Elementary School, discussed ways in which Cambodian parents might get involved with local school councils and the PTA without feeling alienated or unwelcome. She also presented specific information concerning:

- Roles and duties of teachers and schools.
- Parents' roles and responsibilities in educating their children.
- Parents' influence on school policies.
- Relationships between parents and school personnel.
- Responsibility of the local school council.
- General operation of local school councils and Parent/Teacher Associations.

When discussing the possibility of organizing a Cambodian Parents Association, Sovalee Mao recommended: "When planning an event, have the parents come. Then make the parents important people. Invite them to come share with us their experiences and not come just to learn. We should not make them look bad or tell them how to be good parents. We should ask them to come in to share with us what they know about their children, share how they can help us with issues. Have gifts for them like pens or folders with information that they can take home. Treat them as important participants at a conference or meeting."

Dr. The Dao, Coordinator of Youth and Family Counseling, Asian Human Services of Chicago, gave suggestions for engaging parents from a Vietnamese-American perspective. "Let them know the benefits of working with children. First, have them come to meetings at our agency. Then, we can go to the school together. Parents can then bring home everything they have learned and apply it to the student."

PARENT ADVOCACY

At NAFSPP's retreat, Rafael Sanchez, Principal of Roosevelt High told parents, "Nothing happens in school without the help of the parents. Parents have more power than they realize. You need to come into the school to see what is happening. I'm paid to serve you. I'm not paid for you to serve me! Parents need to exercise power, to tell the school what you need."

Cambodian and Vietnamese parents appreciated Sanchez's openness and took the opportunity to voice their concerns about some recent problems at the school.

In one incident, several Cambodian students were watching a fight among other students in the school yard after school. As punishment, the students watching the fight were suspended from school for ten days. Cambodian parents were upset that they had not been previously informed of the school's policy of disciplining students caught within 100 feet of a fight. Mr. Tep of the Cambodian Association of Illinois, representing Cambodian parents at their request, attempted to schedule a meeting with Principal Sanchez, but was referred instead to hearing officers.

When Tep tried to get parents to meet with school administrators, parents expressed their fear of the negative consequences that might be triggered by such action. The incident revealed parents' fears of challenging school authority and the need for schools to acknowledge the authority of community-based organizations.

A Vietnamese community worker described a second incident in which three high school students were expelled during their final semester for being absent from school on 33 occasions: "The parent came with me to complain to the principal. After talking with the principal, the parent said, 'Sometimes, we have to accept disciplinary measures.' This increased communication between the school and the family. I explained to the parent, 'You're going to have to understand the school, and the school will have to understand you more.' Next year, the expelled students should be back to finish school."

In another incident related to a school summer program, a Vietnamese parent told the meeting, "We sent representatives of VSPA to the school to discuss a program at Roosevelt High School. We insist they open a special program during summer school. Finally, Mr. Sanchez successfully convinced the teachers to continue summer school for six weeks in English and in math."

NEW BEGINNINGS

Successful parent advocacy efforts comprise just one aspect of NAFSPP's impact on Vietnamese and Cambodian communities and schools in Chicago. One school counselor observed, "We have more people from the community working in schools." Community members also noted changes in school staff's perceptions of Asian parents. During the early stages of the project, some parents heard staff comment such as, "Asian parents know there are problems with the students, but they don't want to be part of the solution." Perceptions changed as school staff began to participate in collaborative planning meetings held at various Asian community organizations.

By becoming actively involved in Asian community programs, school staff acquired a new understanding of the Asian student population. One staff member commented, "I, and the school, will try to do all we can to help Asian students."

In the aftermath of NAFSPP, Vietnamese Students' Parents Association president Dr. The Dao declared, "VAI will be hosting a conference for one hundred parents and students to discuss what VSPA did last year as well as our future plans. We will organize meetings for students and for parents. Then we will discuss bylaws for a permanent organization."

SAN DIEGO: STEPS TOWARD PARTNERSHIP

"This has never happened before. Many community leaders came together and met with the group of parents and gave support and talked about the Lao children in school."

LAO COMMUNITY SERVICE WORKER
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

As Lao high school folk dancers clasped hands and lowered their foreheads in a gesture ending their dance, more than 400 parents, students, teachers, and administrators rose to cheer and applaud. The students' performance closed a Lao educational celebration designed both to recognize achievements of Lao students and to afford Lao families and school staff an opportunity to ask and answer questions about education.

In the Horton Elementary School auditorium, mainstream teachers and administrators stood out in the predominantly Lao crowd. For some teachers, this would be their first Lao cultural event. For many Lao parents, the event would provide their first experience of an educational panel where all comments would be translated into the Lao language.

Joanne Wall, principal of Horton Elementary, commended parents and teachers for attending the celebration. She urged Lao parents to continue to participate in educational programs. "Now every time we hold a school meeting, we need parents to come out, to participate. If you don't come, no one is there to speak up for your children. This program is one step towards being more involved in school meetings, and for volunteering at school."

Facing a panel of school administrators, one Lao parent asked a translator, "How can we volunteer when we do not speak English? Or when we are not comfortable being at school?" Administrators took turns responding. "At O'Farrell School, we are trying to make parents feel comfortable. The first step is having a room where you can come and relax, have tea and cookies. Second, we hope you'll just go into the classroom and sit and observe. Hopefully, you'll start feeling more comfortable. You'll belong." Another said, "No matter what language you speak, you can listen to a child read. And the children who speak Lao will all benefit from your presence." Parents continued to raise questions as all responses were translated.

The educational celebration, scheduled to end at 8 pm, ran overtime as groups of students gathered on the stage to receive individual certificates for academic achievement. After being congratulated, many students posed for pictures, holding certificates against their chests so that their printed names remained in full view of flashing cameras. When informed that janitors would soon need to begin clearing the room, parents resisted. "No, no. We will clean the room. We want the program to continue." They hoped to savor proud moments of student achievement, to linger over the community dinner, to continue to explore issues, and to applaud student dancers who had practiced many hours for this event.

For many, the Lao educational celebration became a significant example of how dialogue might continue between Lao community leaders and mainstream school staff. Organized through the National Asian Family/School Partnership Project (NAFSPP), the event culminated two years of intensive work that broadened the perspectives of the historically dominant groups abut the meaning of "partnerships" in education. Lao parents and community leaders worked with school district staff to create a relationship characterized by schools hiring Lao translators to improve communication, Lao parents voicing their concerns, shared decision making in regard to parent institutes and curricula, and the growth of a Lao PTA.

NAFSPP consultant Dr. Bounlieng Phommasouvanh described how the district changed past patterns of designing programs for the Lao community: "It was the first time the school and community took the initiative to work together in planning. The Lao community made proposals to the school district from the community. Before, it was the other way around. The district sponsored and planned all events."

CONTEXT

Approximately 20,000 Lao reside in the San Diego area. Seventy percent are families with incomes below poverty guidelines; only 35 to 40 percent of the labor force is employed. In San Diego, most of the Lao population lives in the Southeast area, in the Mid-City and Market Street communities.

NAFSPP identified the Horton Elementary School and the Wilson Middle School as partnership sites. Of the total student population of 1,000 students from grades K to 6 at Horton Elementary, 11.8 percent are Lao. At Wilson Middle School 23.6 percent are Southeast Asian, 1.3 percent are other Asian, and 41.2 percent are Hispanic. Horton Elementary School, in the Southeast area of the San Diego Unified School District, is situated in a community of apartment buildings, duplexes, and single-family dwellings, most of which are rentals.

Local historians agree that Wilson Middle School was one of the cornerstones in the development of East San Diego. The communities of City Heights, Normal Heights, Kensington, and Talmadge all emerged after the school was built.

In the newspaper story "Lives Filled with Fear: We Can't Even Dream of Being Alive Tomorrow," (*San Diego Union*, January 18, 1994) Khanh Doan, 15, describes his neighborhood:

> **"City Heights is a neighborhood in the mid-city of San Diego. It is a dangerous place. I don't leave my house except when I have to. There are gang fights and drug deals, and many nights all other sound is drowned out by the police helicopter overhead or by gunshots."**

The project built upon existing partnerships each school had previously created with groups such as the Naval Education and Training Support Center, the Pacific

Center for Parent Involvement in Education (CPIE) for African American parents, and the Parent Institute for Spanish, Laotian, and English-speaking families.

THE LAO COMMUNITY

While the San Diego public schools employ a number of Lao instructional aides and teacher aides, only two certified Lao teachers work for the schools. One Lao community leader noted, "Although the educational level of most Lao remains painfully low, an increasing number of students are returning to the universities to undertake academic pursuits in engineering, medicine, law, computer science, business, and teaching."

The Lao community developed more than 30 organizations to serve its growing population. Of these organizations, the following have the most active membership: Lao Community Cultural Center, Lao Women's Association, Lao PTA of San Diego, Lao Senior Citizens Association, Education Foundation for Lao Students, Lao Buddharam Temple, Lanexang Student Association, and the Lao Advisory Committee.

The Lanexang Student Association of San Diego County (LSA) and the Lao PTA of San Diego—two Lao community-based organizations that worked with NAFSPP—are non-profit organizations with no outside funding sources. Both exist solely through volunteer efforts. Established in 1981 to respond to requests from the Lao students in San Diego, the Lanexang Student Association of San Diego County is comprised of Lao students and educators. LSA's stated purpose is to:

- Encourage Lao students to finish high school and continue on to higher education.
- Provide tutoring in all subjects after school and on weekends.
- Encourage Lao youth to learn, appreciate, publicize the Lao cultural heritage.
- Assimilate Laotian students into the mainstream for better adjustment in the new culture.
- Establish public relations between Lao students and the community at-large or better understanding and cooperation.

LSA played a strong leadership role in enabling Lao parents to attend parent workshops. Each year, more than 1,000 students and parents participate in parent workshops, student workshops, or student and parent potluck dinners. LSA's tutoring program reaches out to increasing numbers of students from junior high to university levels. LSA's volunteers also provide educational counseling and assistance in completing college and filling out financial aid applications.

One parent stated that the Lao community in San Diego has many organizations, but they don't seem to give education a high priority. Parents suggested that NAFSPP invite leaders of Lao community organizations to meetings to discuss issues confronting their children. Parents also cited the need to teach children the Lao language and culture because "too many children are lost. These young people need to know who they are and understand their cultural heritage." They suggested that parents from Wilson and Horton schools form a committee at each school to become more actively involved in education while discussing problems and needs of their children. The larger group also scheduled a meeting to form a parent steering committee.

A parents' conference held later that fall identified Lao parents' concerns and the barriers to their involvement, as reported by Bounpraseuth Boungnasen:

> **"As you can see, most of our Lao parents are deeply concerned with the education of their children, but many of them are not familiar with the American educational system and instructional programs. Many parents still assume that education of their children is the sole responsibility of the school.**
>
> **"Parents and their children often face special challenges in understanding and dealing with important institutions like schools. Because successful education is a key factor in whether or not children later become productive members of the community, it is crucial for parents to understand how to guide their children through the school system. To avoid a legacy of dependence, it is important to develop leadership within the Lao community groups and support self-help activities that truly empower the Lao community.**
>
> **"In Laos, education is very centralized. Everything derives from the Ministry of Education; the local school simply carries out the policy, curriculum, and regulations. Most Lao parents have not understood the American view of the parents' role in education. Most have accepted a passive role and choose to accept educators as experts and are reluctant to say anything contrary to teachers, fearing they may be speaking out of turn. In the United States, parents have the right and obligation to be involved in our children's education and contribute to the betterment of the local school for the benefit of our own children."**

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

After San Diego school administrators and the Lao community first met to discuss their participation in NAFSPP, a Lao community member commented, "This was the first time Lao parents and community leaders had a chance to meet directly with school administrators to plan a program."

Another Lao community leader noted, "The project helped set up the meeting between school and parents. Before, the school district set up the meetings; but this meeting was different. This time, the community-based organization set up the meeting. The Lao community feels like they're part of the meeting. It's from them. They set the agenda." This initial project group developed a long-range workplan that identified the following goals:

- Train Lao individuals to give Parent Institute classes in Lao.
- Coordinate the Lao New Year community celebration.
- Develop student tutoring program after school for Lao students.
- Develop information program for Lao parents on cultural aspects of school programs such as sixth-grade camp, promotion, and health education.

The following month, more than 90 Lao parents attended the Sixth Annual County-wide Parent Involvement Conference. Strong participation by Lao parents reflected the school district's collaborative outreach work with Lao organizations and leaders. In previous years, no more than 30 Lao parents had attended this conference.

The project consultant noted that after San Diego was selected as a site, the school and community:

> **"...widely opened their communication. The parents got together more often at community meetings and conferences. They discussed the education of their children. They wanted to know more about what the school has taught their children and what the school could do to help Lao students. They also wanted to know what kind of programs are out there that are best for their children and to have more programs available for the benefit of their children. Parents seem to have become more involved in participating in their children's success in school."**

During the partnership building process, all parties found it helpful for schools to subsidize some of the costs of partnership activities. Both the Wilson and the Horton Schools assumed responsibility for preparing, printing, and sending flyers to parents, arranging for and/or bearing the costs of contacting the parents by telephone, and providing child care for parent workshop events. From the parents' perspective, "We, as Lao parent volunteers, have unselfishly shared our time, efforts, and energy without asking or claiming any additional compensation. We all worked hard beyond our regular schedule."

IMPROVED COMMUNICATION WITH THE LAO COMMUNITY

One Lao community leader described a request that schools "provide Lao personnel, such as a community aide, to work in the front office to welcome and assist Lao parents on a daily basis. There were many occasions parents were turned down for lack of communication. Many times they have to wait long hours for an interpreter. Sometimes they had to go back home without help."

Although Lao parents wanted to improve the school system and help their children to do better in school, they found it difficult to communicate in English. They came to school meetings, but there was no interpreter to assist them. One parent from Horton said:

> **"Many letters sent home, but I cannot read what it is saying. I brought a letter to school to find somebody to help translate it for me, but nobody was able to help me. I hope the school can hire a community aide to work in the front office to help parents."**

Another parent comment:

> **"Parents need to learn more about the school system. What is the role of parent? How much should they be involved? They know that schools want them to participate. They need to know specific ways. They like to help, but what can they help? They need someone who knows enough about schools. Not all community leaders have been involved in school."**

School staff worked to respond to issues raised by parents. To encourage parents to call the school, Joanne Wall, principal of the Horton Elementary school, described the Homework Hotline that allows parents to phone in questions.

> **"We pay someone who speaks Laotian. If you haven't called us or we can't reach you, we try to do a home visit. Any time you have a question or concern about homework or anything happening in the classroom, you can leave a message on the voice mail. If you speak in Laotian, we'll ask someone who speaks Laotian to translate. There are primary language aides who may already know the answers to your questions. They'll be able to speak to you in Lao."**

PARENT INSTITUTES

San Diego's Chapter I program provided three leadership training sessions for Lao parents and school staff. Parents asked many questions about how Chapter I funds might be used to address the needs of older students who are newcomers to America. Parents wanted to learn more about Chapter I in their native language. They explained how classes run by Lao trainers allow them to understand information more clearly; they also felt more comfortable asking questions in their native language. After giving serious consideration to the Lao parents' requests, school district personnel organized a training program for Asian paraprofessionals to prepare Asian paraprofessionals to train parents about Chapter I in their native language.

At the Horton School and the Wilson School, the Parent Institute held a series of sessions to help Lao parents learn about their education rights and responsibilities and become more involved in their children's education. For the first time, the more than 20 parents who attended had the opportunity to use their own language in a workshop. Parent Institute classes used a new Lao curriculum that was translated as part of the NAFSPP partnership building process between the Horton Elementary School, the Wilson Middle School, members of the Lao community, and the Parent Institute.

One participant noted: "Parents have the opportunity to learn more about the school system. They feel comfortable to talk with the teacher, especially if the trainer is from their own native language. Then they will ask a lot of questions. Then they talk a lot. Parents feel English is a barrier. Even if they have questions, they won't ask in English." A Lao community leader said, "The value of the Parent Institute classes were in the discussions the parents had. While the information presented was crucial, the real meaning to them is to hear parents talk about the problems they have and to find out what they have in common."

Although Parent Institutes were already established as a San Diego City School District program, having a Lao-speaking district staff person to work on contacting parents and Lao community organizations became a successful strategy for maximizing parent outreach.

THE CONCERNS OF LAO PARENTS

During a parent meeting at the Lao Buddharam Temple, parents expressed the following needs:

1. More teachers' aides or community aides who can work in the office to call parents and help parents in Lao language to make parents feel more comfortable when they come to school and ask for help.
2. Translate into Lao all letters that school will send home as well as parent meetings at school. Home language will make parents more interested in school activities and will bridge the communication gap between school and student's family.
3. To understand more about the bilingual program and the sheltered English program.
4. To understand school rules, regulations, and consequences.
5. To know about safety of their children at school.

At the first Lao Parent Conference, co-sponsored by NAFSPP, more than 100 participants—parents from more than 30 schools, Lao community leaders, and school officials—generated a comprehensive list of their concerns and comments:

1. Parents feel that school staff "don't treat our Lao kids fair enough."
2. Request that Lao PTA and other organizations get together to find better solutions to existing problems with school.
3. Need Lao PTA to promote school information through Lao Bulletin.
4. Prefer dress code for both staff and students.
5. Request that schools don't suspend or expel any student no matter how he/she violated the school rules. We prefer them to be sent to one of the counseling agencies or other related institutions to fix it.
6. Please do not criticize parents for not doing a good job.
7. Do not let the law be on kids' side.
8. Request that school hire more aides, at least two per school site.
9. Please send all school papers or reports home in Lao language.
10. What kind of safety precautions does the department of education initiate?
11. Absences: Students go to school but are not always in class. School fails to report to parent in time. School must report or advise parents about every single period.
12. Fighting: Please punish only the one that started problem, not both parties.
13. Don't send student home after having a fight. Please keep them in school. Give him/her more assignments.
14. We are very happy to see this kind of conference. Please organize it more often; weekday evening is preferable.
15. Please don't take a word from student for granted. Many times student calls home and change phone number without parents knowing it.
16. Need to hire more Lao community aides at schools that have many Lao students.
17. Request the department of education approve additional curriculum to allow Lao cultural class in school.
18. Need cooperation from parents to bring photos, pictures and any articles or antiques related to Lao culture to school for use as teaching materials.

Lao parents also noted an increase of gangs and their criminal and violent behavior. Most gangs had been recently formed and had several encounters with gangs from the African-American community. One Lao leader commented: "Lao parents have a deep sense that they have lost control over their teenagers whom they view as 'high-risk,' leaving school before high school graduation, and being involved in criminal activities." Other common concerns raised by the Lao community included the lack of after-school activities to keep youth off the streets and the high dropout rate of Asian students.

SOME PROMISING RESULTS

Throughout the project, schools increased their efforts to reach out to Lao parents. Schools hired translators, worked with Lao community leaders and organizations, and encouraged mainstream staff to attend Lao community events. At the same time, Lao community-based organizations took steps to increase educational services to

Lao students by developing after-school programs, improving communication between the community and schools, providing translation and interpretation services, and communicating the demand for bilingual and bicultural education. As a result, Lao parents learned more about the U.S. school system, parents' rights and responsibilities, discipline, and significant aspects of American culture. Many Lao parents felt they "have become comfortable" at school sites. Through the reorganized Lao PTA, parents and teachers have created an organization to provide support and advocacy.

Family/school partnership building in Asian communities requires all partners to become open to new terms of partnership. All must expect partnerships to be formed in ways that differ from past practices; the existing structures that schools have maintained for parental involvement will have to be reshaped. On whose terms will partnership exist? Whose perspective will prevail? Issues of authority and power will now have to be explored and negotiated.

PHILADELPHIA: LOCALIZING NATIONAL ASIAN FAMILY/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

"When people came into Philadelphia, the first thing they could ask is, 'Where is the Cambodian Association?' We are part of the community, grown up here, established by the people. So people just know us automatically. They expect us to have all kind of programs. They come in without asking us, 'Can you help?' They come here and tell us they want help. They expect us to do everything."

WUTHA CHIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMBODIAN ASSOCIATION
OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

The development of family/school partnerships in Philadelphia parallels the spiraling growth of programs run by the Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia (CAGP). Incorporated in 1979 as a community-based, non-profit mutual assistance association, the Cambodian Association's mission is to improve the quality of life of Cambodian refugees in the city of Philadelphia, addressing issues such as health, education, crime prevention, conflict resolution and inter-group tension prevention, and delivery of direct social service to disadvantaged Cambodian refugees. Services include emergency food, transportation, emergency housing, job referrals, family counseling, and translations.

Wutha Chin, CAGP Executive Director, explained the complex dynamics surrounding the significant growth of the association's outreach to families.

> **"Real life is complicated. Our clients come in with different problems. We cannot turn them back just because we don't have a program to deal with that. So we have to help them. The program director works with parents and families in schools. And if someone comes in with a welfare problem—help us to appeal, fill out the forms, or things of that nature—they will go back home if we don't help them. If we send them back home, no other place will help. So we help them."**

From initial support through "seed funds" provided by NAFSPP, staff exposure to new ideas and information, and the insights gained by reflecting on work with families and schools, the Cambodian Association's outreach to families grew from a small parent/school partnership at Lowell Elementary School with a $2,500 budget, to a program with three components and a budget exceeding $85,000 for work in at least eight schools.

During the 1993–1994 school year, the Cambodian Association created and successfully obtained additional funding for its Parents/Schools Partnership Project designed to address the specific needs and concerns of Southeast Asian parents and their children. The project's goal is to decrease the number of Southeast Asian student dropouts by increasing the involvement of Southeast Asian parents. The project proposal listed the following objectives:

1. To encourage and promote communication and cooperation between Southeast Asian parents and local public schools staff, administration, and principal.
2. To promote the involvement of Cambodian parents in public school affairs that impact upon their school-aged children.
3. To encourage parents to recognize and exercise their rights and responsibilities in order to ensure that their children stay in school, and to ensure for them a quality education.

As Wutha Chin recalled:

> **"So then we start to get some money. Not big money, but $20,000 to start the parent project, to see where are we going with the family/school partnership project for about six months. Then I got another $3,000 to extend the project beyond that. Instead of family/school partnership, we started a family/youth project, which again we derived from the idea of parent/school partnership.**
>
> **"We start to realize that parent/school partnership alone is not enough. So I created a Parent/Youth Project—basically three different components. We have the after-school tutoring program and a mentoring program. When we identify a kid with a problem, we will send him out there for counseling. After we talk to the kid, parents also need to go out. So we have another family component which means all our case managers are trained to provide counseling to parents. The parents also get involved. So one project covers the whole structure of the family. But overall, it's about family, about education. It's about parent involvement and things like that. Empowering parents and school.**
>
> **"All these ideas come from the parent/school partnership. If we didn't do the parent/school partnership, then we wouldn't have the idea of how we want to serve children. Again the ultimate goal of the parent/school partnership is to provide better quality education to the kids. And we cannot provide a better quality education unless the kid is also involved in the school, or willing to do something better for themselves. Total of this project is about $85,000 in grants. And our next steps? We got a contract to do parent involvement in eight schools. This is a new grant. And that comes from the little pilot—the $2,500—that we have from NAFSPP."**

CONTEXT

The community/school partnership building process in Philadelphia between the James Lowell Elementary School and the Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia (CAGP) is one example of how an established community-based Asian organization with a strong record of providing social services might work collaboratively with a local school where staff members actively support and continue to learn about Asian community issues.

Although Cambodian community members expressed sincere appreciation for the school principal's supportive efforts, it is significant that in the community/school partnership building process, a "top-down" leadership model did not prevail. Leadership and program activities were generated by community members since the project's inception, evidenced by ongoing community forums to hear and to address needs expressed by community members.

The Cambodian Association's 1995 Annual Report noted that Cambodian refugee school-age children (K–12) have a greater chance for academic failure and dropping out of school than they do of graduating, securing an adequate job, or going on to college. "By the Philadelphia Public School Board of Education's estimates, Southeast Asian students, of whom 85 percent are Cambodian, have a 42 percent dropout rate; non-Cambodian students in Philadelphia area schools have a 20 percent dropout rate." In 1994, Lowell Elementary School identified 205 students as Limited English Proficient (LEP); of these, 79 were Cambodian.

Estimated Number of Cambodian Students in Selected Philadelphia Public Schools:

Birney Elementary	216	Olney High	260
Cook Middle	184	South Philadelphia High	300
Lowell Elementary	176	Furness High	200
Olney Elementary	76	University City High	300

According to the Cambodian Association, Cambodians have a relatively low literacy rate. Even in the grades before high school, Cambodian youth rank among the highest in dropout rates. Many criminal activities such as theft and other felony cases have been youth gang related. Additionally, the percentage of teenage and unplanned pregnancies is on the rise.

WHY CAMBODIAN STUDENTS DROP OUT OF SCHOOL

As a Cambodian American who had attended high school in Philadelphia, the executive director of the Cambodian Association presented insights on how and why many Cambodian students drop out of school:

> **"They cut a lot because they don't have what you call freedom to go out after school. Asian parents expect that when you go to school, you come back, straight home. Most of the time you don't get permission to go out after school, especially girls. So cutting school is the only way you can go out.**
>
> **"And it's very easy to lie to your parents. When you cut, they never know it. When the school machine calls to let parents know that their child cut, the kid picks up the phone and hangs up. Parents wouldn't know. When the report card comes, it doesn't say cut, it says 'absent' or 'late.' The kid can explain anything. Parents do not understand the American system. Kids can make up stories. The parents believe the kids.**

> "But the more you cut, the more you hate school. You do badly. Your grades go from As to Fs, or As to Ds, and you start to feel you have no future. You just want to go out more and not care about school anymore. When you cut, you hang out. There's peer pressure. You meet gangs on the street and start having fun—girl, boy, girl, boy—so why go to school? If you are in a gang, it's really hard to let go. When you want to go back to school, your parents start saying, 'Oh you homeboy now,' and things like that. There's peer pressure, and parents are not there. It's easy for a kid to lose track. When the children cut classes, parents don't know what to do. In most cases, parents cannot communicate with the teachers or the students at home. The situation gets worse and worse."

The executive director also described his strategy for responding to calls from parents or schools:

> "We invite both parents to come—parents and the kid. You and I will agree that when the kid has a problem, the problem is not the kid. The problem must be coming from somewhere. And when a family has problem, it's not caused by one person, it's caused by a family as a whole. So we invite parents and the kid to come in. And then we start to talk.
>
> "Each case is different. And there's no one solution for it. First, we talk to the kid to see what problem they have, why they choose to do certain things. They will tell us why they choose to do certain things. And we write it down. And we're not going to tell them it's bad or good. Then we're going to talk to parents. What do they think about their kid. What start the problem? When? Where? How? And how much they know about it. There we can measure how much time the parents are involved with the kid. If we start asking simple questions, 'What is your kid's teacher's name? What grade is he in? And what school he go to?' Things like that. Guess what? Most of the parents don't know that question. They don't know the answer to the question, period. Then we start knowing that the involvement of parents is not there. So that's where we start showing what they have done, which is why kids have that kind of problem."

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

Early in the partnership building process, speakers from two community-based organizations—Asian Americans United and the Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia—gave presentations to the Lowell Elementary School faculty. The Cambodian Association presented information on the topic of gangs, their mentor/tutorial program, educational resources, and community services. The representative from Asian Americans United spoke about the new American Curriculum Studies, the rights of parents, and Asian American history.

A meeting with parents and Lowell Elementary School faculty also proved to be a valuable experience for the teachers and staff who attended. Representatives from the Cambodian Association presented the purpose of the project:

> "... for parents to assist teachers while being effective parents in their new culture and to teach parents some basic educational rights. We want to provide and keep educational values between home and school very close. We

want to create situations for schools to explore new ways of working together with our children."

At the meeting, a representative from Asian Americans United gave a presentation on Asian American history that included: discussions of early Asian settlers in the U.S. during the 1700s and 1800s; anti-Asian violence and discrimination against Asian Americans; issues of classism, racism, and sexism; and the different generations of Asian American experience. School faculty posed the following questions:

- Who do parents report to?
- If there is a difference between local and national groups, who gets the right to decide about school issues?
- Will we be the advocates and set up the parent committees? If so, when?
- What will this association demand of the parents?
- How do we advocate for their struggles between two cultures and basic educational rights?
- What are parents expected to do to prepare? What are the benefits of doing so?

The success of the parent/faculty meeting was reflected not only in the value of educational material presented, but in the positive response—the openness and support—with which information was received. Describing the meeting, a Cambodian representative wrote, "The principal was very supportive regarding all the information. It made an incredible impact and all agreed on the fact that we're going to work this out together. We will assist one another to promote more tutors to work with Lowell students."

During the fall semester, Lowell teachers contacted the Cambodian Association to express the need for full Cambodian parent participation at their first parent/teacher conference of the year. The Cambodian Association sent several of their staff to the Lowell School to assist in the conferences. Parent participation was high—more than 90 percent. Parents had a chance to have meaningful discussions and to meet with Cambodian Association staff. At several informal meetings, parents discussed issues related to school's responsibilities, parental rights, and program possibilities for the school and the Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia. Lowell School and the Cambodian Association took the lead in organizing community led discussions about gang issues.

Addressing a concern of parents lacking information about schools and school functions, the school and the Cambodian Association agreed to hold "An Evening with Cambodian Parents." The agenda included: presentations of school information; an opportunity to visit newly built classrooms and parent rooms in the new building; meetings with teachers and administrators; presentations on the importance of the school library as well as information on how to access library services; and summer activities for children and parents.

By that winter, the NAFSPP representative noted that Lowell School seemed to be more sensitive to the needs of parents than before; the school was willing to extend itself to promote the partnership building with the Cambodian community. Concrete evidence of the school's improving attitude was demonstrated by the hiring of three new Cambodian bilingual staff at Lowell School. At the same time, the NAFSPP representative observed that the Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia had shifted from being almost totally social-service oriented to having more of a focus on education issues. More tutoring programs were in place and the Association organized ESL, culture, and self-esteem classes.

EMPOWERING PARENTS

> **"We've been doing this for two years now, the parent/school partnership. And if any parent contacts us, we send our staff there and translate for the parents. Usually it's very good. Somehow, maybe through the meeting, we explain to them about the report card, absences, behavior, and things like that—the system in America. And what happens is a lot of parents show up and the school invites us for training. So we established the Khmer Parent Union. And then we have a meeting with them. Because of the language barrier, our staff gets the training and then we trained the parents. So that parent in the Khmer Parent Union will talk to other parents, trying to get other parents in. And then we explain to them about the rights and responsibilities in the school."**
>
> **Cheata Suy, CAGP Program Director**

The Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia, Lowell School, and the Khmer Parent Union jointly sponsored an Asian Parents' Night during the project's second year. At the meeting, Wutha Chin encouraged parents to get involved in their children's education by joining the Khmer Parent Union. He also urged parents to seek the best possible education for their children and to express their concerns and ideas to school authorities. A speaker from the Parents Union for Public Schools spoke about parents' rights in the school system. More than 120 parents, students, community leaders, and school staff attended the event.

At a meeting with the Khmer Parent Union, NAFSPP staff explained that as parents, they have the right to ask the school questions—to question the school about their practices. Some Khmer parents felt that they were put down because they did not speak any English; others were disrespectful to them. Yet at this meeting Khmer parents were encouraged to voice their concerns. The NAFSPP director made it clear that the project was not "telling parents what to do." Instead, it is up to the parents to decide what to do or what not to do. "The project's position is always getting more parents to speak up on all the issues, to get parents to be informed of all issues. And if parents are not informed, then we have the responsibility to get parents informed."

During the meetings, Ms. Suy, the CAGP Program Director described a case in which a student had a problem with a teacher:

> **"When we talked to his mom she asked, 'Why?' She didn't know where to go or what to do. She was afraid if she's going to school, they might say that she's going to look for trouble. That's what happens to a lot of Cambodian parents. They tend to think that, 'If I go there and ask questions, they afraid that the teacher will think they're looking for trouble.' Because they think that teachers are like the second parents for their kids. So whatever the teacher says, you know, now it's okay. Now for them to go and question, it's like you question their authority, their knowledge. So they're afraid of that. That's why they ask me to go."**

Citing the value of open discussions during meetings, one Cambodian American professional related some of the struggles that Cambodian parents currently face:

> **"I grew up in a family that figured you're not supposed to talk about your family's problems. They think, there's nothing going to happen, I'm fine, I'm fine. Sometimes meeting in a circle, parents start to talk about their children, 'You know, I have this type of problem. My kid now is 15 years old and he**

> **want to go out. Or she want to go out.' When one parent start to talk, the other jump in, too. So to me, I'm very surprised to hear how they talk about their problems because I know that we don't go out and talk about what kind of problems we have. We just say, 'I'm fine. I can take care of it.' But they expressed themselves.**
>
> **"They notice that it's really hard to raise a kid here because of the law. You know, if you discipline your child a certain way, you have Child Protective Services on your back. It's a problem for them. But we explain to them when we have a meeting, 'You can discipline your child in a certain way.' Now some parents, they don't say anything. 'I can't talk now because otherwise they'll call the police. And I can't speak the language. And when the police come in, what am I going to do?' But we explain to them to understand their rights. They can do things up to here and here, but not cross the line. So then they begin to understand and not feel so frustrated."**

AN ESL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The establishment of a self-contained sheltered English class at Lowell Elementary School generated a number of questions from Cambodian community leaders and parents. The CAGP program director described how misunderstandings occurred between Cambodian parents and school staff.

> **"The school says that they have a meeting with parents and the parents say, 'Okay, that's fine with me,' because they think that it's best for their children. But when we (CAGP) have meeting with parents, I explained to them, 'This is how they're going to do it and the reason why is because they want to help this kid.' But once they understand the program, they get frustrated. They said, 'I don't want my child to be in there.' 'Is my child in there?' They said they like ESOL class but they also want their kids in a grade class also, not just all there."**

At the NAFSPP National Networking Conference, key players decided that teachers and parents from Lowell School and CAGP would form an ESOL Advisory Committee to address concerns and give the school input on ESOL issues. The Advisory Committee comprised of parents, ESOL staff, other school staff, and CAGP staff organized its first meeting several months later. One Cambodian parent noted later: "I learned not to feel that school is a place with all these people with higher knowledge and we cannot say anything. It's different from my country and here."

STRATEGIES FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Reflecting on nearly three years of experience, CAGP's executive director described lessons learned from the process of building family/school partnerships:

> **"At least we learn what schools have done and how much effort schools have put trying to get parents involved. And we learned that they don't do it all. You can see we do have an impact on parents. Parents can be a role model and help other parents. We work with them, we ask them to help us to recruit more parents and let parents be proud. A lot of parents, when things are**

> **going on in school, they feel reluctant to go; they feel ashamed because the language is hard. When they get together, they speak the Cambodian language. Sometimes they feel embarrassment, you know. So that's why for a lot of activities in school, parents cannot go. So the Khmer Parents Union comes in. They organize their own activity in the school."**

New knowledge and assumptions utilized by CAGP and schools in Philadelphia may potentially benefit other settings. CAGP's executive director advises other school and community leaders to "allow parents the opportunity to be leaders rather than be followers."

> **"We organized an Asian Parents' Night. Asian parents all organized the event. So instead of the school inviting Asian parents, Asian parents organized the event, inviting other parents and the school to participate. So that changed the role. So that's what we're doing now. So parents when they go, they go there as organizers rather than as participants. We have successfully done that event, a lot of parents involved. And it's really wonderful.**
>
> **"We want parents themselves to create activity where they can be decision makers and then do something they like to do, and then get other parents involved. Ask them what they'd like to do, rather than invite them in and tell them what they should do. Because if you tell them what to do, what they should do, and then if it's something they don't like to do, or they don't know how to do, they start to feel embarrassed. Ask them what they can do best and utilize that skill. That's what we do."**

Another valuable partnership building strategy was a translation by CAGP of a Parental Rights brochure first published in English by the Philadelphia's Parents Union for Public Schools. A Cambodian version is now available to all Cambodian parents in Philadelphia. The association also plans to produce a video on parental rights and responsibilities.

To support community/school partnerships, the Lowell principal successfully acquired three additional teaching positions for minority teachers in his school. The three positions were filled by two Cambodians and one Korean. The principal had to fight for these bilingual positions, believing "there is a great need for role model teachers for the bilingual kids." While commending schools for hiring bilingual staff, one CAGP staff member described how some bilingual school staff persons still remain less than accessible to the community:

> **"If parents have problems, usually they contact us, first even though they know that the school has a bilingual assistant. But that person cannot pick up the phone all the time. Usually, you go through the main office. And then you need to know who you want to speak to and then they transfer your call. So parents call us because they know that there's always Cambodian speaking people on the other side. If they need to see the teacher or the principal, then we arrange it. If they need us to go with them, we go as the translators."**

CAGP's program director affirmed the value of CAGP staff working with the Khmer Parents Union.

> **"Parents felt we could help them. They like it because they have a place to go to where they know where to start if there is a problem with the school. They know where to start or who to talk to as a first step. Maybe once, we hear their case and we can't do it, we'll refer them to a different place. And we ask them, 'Do you need us to go there with you?' And most of the time, they want us to go with them. We follow up. We just call them. We work with counselor.**

> **If the kid cuts again, let us know. We work with the parents. If the parent have problem and can not go to school, they call us. That's what we are, the communicators, intermediate. We're the bridge. So parents can go through us to the school. And school can go through us to the parents."**

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE PROGRAMS

To illustrate how schools sometimes create seemingly attractive though culturally inappropriate activities for parents, the CAGP executive director drew an example of an institution that wanted to recruit Asian elderly to a program that featured Richard Simmons: "Richard Simmons? To Cambodian elderly people? I mean, who cares? This kind of activity sounds good, but it's not suited to our elderly people. This kind of thing, it doesn't work. When you try to get parents involved, they will come in, they get bored, they go back home. And next time you invite them, they won't show up."

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Many school staff have traditionally asked: "How do we involve parents?" or "Why don't Asian parents attend our meetings or training?" In Philadelphia, schools successfully engaged parents in the process of being involved in their children's education by first drawing on the expertise of Cambodian community leaders and organizations. CAGP's executive director emphasized the advantages of the community-based organizations (CBOs) and leaders taking charge of programs:

> **"They (CBOs) can provide the language that no other people can do. They can understand the problem because they live there, they've been there, they come from there, they're one of them. So they can understand the culture, where people are coming from. Number two, maybe the community is not expert in dealing with certain educational things, but that is not an excuse. They always can train someone to do it. I mean the school can spend some money to train someone in the community to do it. Number three, the community agency is located in the community where people walk in to get services every day. So we don't have to work so hard to reach out, to send messages to the people.**
>
> **"School should start working with the community group. They know that working with parents is sometimes difficult because the language is not there. When you're talking about refugee groups, there's always a refugee agency or some community leaders they can contact. Using the community leaders is a very, very good resource.**
>
> **"Whatever the problem, the school should work with the community leaders and start subcontracting some programs. Use the resources here. Help the community leader. Otherwise, they will no longer exist. And when they no longer exist, the problem will fall apart."**

MINNEAPOLIS: CHALLENGING VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

> "The first thing is to cooperate and support one another to accomplish something. Parents must help and support their children's education. There must be Hmong teachers to teach our Hmong children well."
>
> HMONG PARENT

During three years of NAFSPP Project partnership building, a Hmong parents' group, already in existence prior to the project, grew to become the Hmong Parent/Teacher/Student Organization (HPTSO). On occasion, HPTSO drew more than one hundred parents, teachers, and students to meetings that enabled parents to actively voice their concerns.

NAFSPP site consultants described HPTSO meetings as a gathering of "very outspoken" members of the Hmong community. "Hmong parents expressed their anger at the schools for teaching their children that parents have no right to punish their children. Every parent that told such a story was applauded. The hot topic was parent discipline and street gangs. One parent could not understand why the authorities disallowed him to chain his daughter to the bed after she stayed out all night. There seemed to be friction between the educators and the Hmong parents."

Educators and researchers often promote the concept of "parent empowerment." But beyond citing the benefits from various theoretical perspectives, are schools truly ready to listen to parents' concerns? Will schools be willing to respond to challenges parents raise as they grow more empowered? NAFSPP site consultant William Waxman, himself a former elementary school principal, posed a critical question: "Once we wake the sleeping giant, are we ready for its roar?"

CONTEXT

Hmong refugees, a minority group from the high plains of Laos, journeyed west after the United States government withdrew from the region. One NAFSPP consultant described the Hmong's role in Southeast Asia: "Since the '60s, Hmong were recruited, trained, and funded by the U.S. government as allies. Hmong served strategic military functions for the U.S. government in its effort to cease the spreading of communism in Southeast Asia, particularly the communist movements between North and South Vietnam."

Minnesota's Hmong population is approximately 25,000 in number and includes, in the Twin Cities, the second largest Hmong community in the United States. A project consultant believes the Minneapolis School District to be the only public school district that employs nearly 50 Hmong staff, including 19 fully certified Hmong teachers and other bilingual teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrative staff.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

In June of 1992, NAFSPP selected Minneapolis as a project site based on its "existing program that encouraged parental involvement as well as a relationship with an Asian community-based organization." The NAFSPP site consultant successfully facilitated collaborative planning meetings in addition to organizing separate meetings with Hmong community-based organizations, such as the Hmong American Partnership and the Hmong Parent Teacher Student Organization (HPTSO), as well as staff and parents at the Hale and the Olson Elementary Schools.

Among those involved in the project since its start were: Soua Yang of the LEP Department of Minneapolis Public Schools; Tschue Vang, program director at the Hmong American Partnership; Kao Lee, president of Hmong Parents Association; Ann Widseth, principal of the Olson School, and Rebecca Yarlott, principal of the Hale School.

Even before the project's inception, it was clear that the Hmong American Partnership (HAP) already had organized programs in schools. As the partnership process developed, more collaborative planning occurred between HAP and school staff.

HMONG AMERICAN PARTNERSHIP

HAP's mission is to assist Minnesota's Hmong in achieving their full potential and in participating actively in the community. Founded in 1990, HAP's vision is to "create a Hmong community organization that would draw equally on the strengths of both cultures." From 1990 to 1995, HAP has grown from 2 programs to 18, from a budget of $400,000 to $1.9 million, and from 500 to over 4,000 clients served annually. HAP operates a variety of programs in three main service areas: self-sufficiency, family, and youth.

A sampling of HAP programs includes: CAREER (Coalition for Achievement of Refugee Early Employment and Retention), a job-seeking and job-placement program for refugee families; CASH (Clerical Advancement Skills for Hmong), a three-month training program that helps low-income residents of the Twin Cities find meaningful employment in the clerical field; a new Microentrepreneurial Program that provides intensive training and access to low-interest loans for Hmong individuals committed to starting their own small businesses; Parent Skills Training; intervention and prevention programs for youth; multicultural training; translations; cultural classes; research projects; and an agency and community newsletter. More than 150 volunteer mentors work through several different programs and provide leadership, guidance, English language practice, practical assistance, and friendship to clients.

HMONG PARENT TEACHER STUDENT ORGANIZATION

The growth of the existing Hmong Parents Association became a significant aspect of the partnership building process in Minneapolis. Unable to attend the first project meeting, Kao Lee of the Hmong Parents Association met with William Waxman independently. Within months of the project's start, Kao Lee reported that the Hmong Parents Association had become the Hmong Parent Teacher Student Organization (HPTSO). With a recently elected Board of Directors and meeting attendance of 100, the organization was beginning to develop more formal goals.

HPTSO held a "Circle Study of Hmong Parents in Minneapolis" attended by 110 parents and teachers. Facilitated by Kao Lee of the HPTSO, Soua Yang of the LEP program, and Carol Johnson, Assistant Superintendent, the meeting concluded that, "LEP programs must be mandatory for every non-English speaking student. Also, parents want to be able send their children to any school they feel is good in quality of teaching, school environment, security and safety, communications, and—most of all—cares enough to pay attention to children and parents."

With a desire to improve communication with parents, Kao Lee suggested that parents meet with HPTSO every three months. He expressed concern about a small percentage of Hmong people at PTA meetings. Although transportation was one problem, Lee felt that parents' high expectations of teachers led Hmong parents to withdraw from teachers whenever teachers failed to meet parental expectations.

HPTSO's mission statement outlined three factors that "affect the daily schooling of every Hmong child in the City of Minneapolis:"

1. For parents to learn to be more involved and to understand school systems in order to support their children both at school and at home.
2. To give incentives that motivate students to participate in school programs and activities, and be able to choose or determine better future careers.
3. To enable Hmong teachers to understand Hmong cultures and way of life to be better able to serve Hmong parents and students.

HPTSO leaders also wrote a document on the background of the Minneapolis Hmong community. Excerpts from this document present community issues from the perspective of the Hmong community.

> **"Until 1993, the ratio of Hmong school dropouts still remain the highest. There are quite many Hmong organizations in the Twin Cities. Yet we must remember that these organizations focus only on adult services. There are no programs, no one individual organization in the Twin Cities, particularly in Minneapolis, committed to support the young.**
>
> **"There are nearly 8,000 Hmong refugees in the Minneapolis Metropolitan Areas. Many children, approximately 1,000 of the 1,900 children currently enrolled in the Minneapolis public and private schools, have immense difficulty in learning. The education and knowledge these children take into their mind and remember as learning experiences are basically 30 percent from their friends, 25 percent from community involvement, 15 percent from the classrooms, 15 percent from media (television), 10 percent from personal growth, and 5 percent from parents and family influences. This makes the Hmong students (in ratio) the highest among teen pregnancy, school dropouts, and problem makers. HPTSO will conduct workshops in different schools to make the students aware of future plans, career opportunities, and, most of all, if one would become involved in human services in the future."**

While this HPTSO background statement may not necessarily be definitive, it is of particular significance in that Hmong community leaders perceive that such conditions exist as issues for the Hmong community.

The NAFSPP site consultant continued to work with the president and board members of the newly restructured HPTSO, which by this time had initiated the process of obtaining legal non-profit status. Project consultants provided technical assistance to HPTSO by editing proposals that HPTSO submitted to private foundations to seek funding for full-time HPTSO staff.

In the fall, HPTSO worked with Minneapolis Public Schools to introduce a Positive Peer Interaction Program to effectively decrease conflict between Asian and African American students. Participating school districts employed a Positive Peer Interaction Coordinator to work with community agencies, parents, police, community social service workers, and other school personnel to implement gang membership prevention strategies.

Approximately 50 people attended a HPTSO meeting at the Bethune School, chosen by HPTSO as the meeting site because the largest concentration of Hmong people live in the area. At the meeting, Hmong parents and teachers discussed the following issues:

- Availability of an early childhood education program.
- School choice and the advisability of siblings attending the same school.
- How parents can get involved in early childhood education.
- The need for parents to demand that Hmong language and culture be taught in school.
- How teachers and principals want parents to involve themselves in their children's education
- Anger at schools for teaching children that parents have no right to punish them.

Kao Lee also published *Hmong Voices*, a Hmong newspaper that generated very positive responses.

PARENTS' VOICES

To assess community needs, HPTSO sent out a "Hmong PTSO Survey" to parents and teachers, printed in both Hmong and English. The survey posed the following questions:

A. What do you want HPTSO to do for you?
B. Do your children have problems in school?
C. Do you know your rights in schools?
D. What about your responsibilities? Why?
E. As parents, what do you want school to do for you?
F. Are you a teacher? What do you want parents to do for you?
G. If you have the magic wand, what would you want schools to be?

Among the responses to the survey by Hmong parents were the following:

> **"I want the school to eliminate all the teaching about sex education. Through these classes many children have become aware and learned so much about sex and pleasure. This is why children are skipping school and do poorly in**

> **classes. School is the place to learn about academic education and not to seek examples of sexuality. Children will always do the opposite of what we tell them to do. The school must control and review these classes and determine why are they necessary and then consult with parents."**
>
> **"The rights in the United States are so much different. I only know my rights as when I was still back in Laos.**
>
> **"We don't know anything about rules of conduct, regulations, policies, and laws in the school system; we would appreciate it very much if someone can teach us."**
>
> **"If I have the magic wand, I will clean up and eliminate all unnecessary classes such as sexual education, crimes and prevention, and drugs and adult disease awareness. I will set forth the school for children to learn mathematics, science, history, languages, geography, biology, etc., that will be needed to obtain jobs and security in their future.**
>
> **"We needed HPTSO to ask for all information to be sent home with the children in the Hmong language so that parents could understand and better instruct children in their assignments."**
>
> **"My children have school problems because they do not know how to do their homework because the teacher did not give examples nor instructed children well."**
>
> **"Ask HPTSO to make requests that all schools that have a Hmong child to have Hmong Teacher to teach and help."**

Parents conveyed concerns and issues from perspectives grounded in more traditional Hmong culture. Clearly, any efforts to create family/school partnerships needed to take cultural perspectives into consideration. Many Hmong parents felt their children to be the school's responsibility: "Whatever happened to the children would be considered faults, mistakes, or abuse by the schools." Another Hmong parent wrote, "When the parent relies on the school, that means they tend to leave everything up to the school." Others said that parents were responsible for raising the child "for the child's welfare, yes, but not for the child's education."

One bilingual teacher noted, "In our (Hmong) culture, when they (teachers) come in and say they're going to help you—it's thought to be something you could see or you could touch. So they don't consider that when you come into a kindergarten class and help the child print a letter, they don't consider that as helping. But in my class, that is a help."

Another bilingual teacher wrote: "The most effective way is hiring more bilingual teachers."

School district staff posed critical questions that would influence the process of creating partnerships with the Hmong community:

> **"How do we play the whole issue of parent involvement or family partnerships? We must design this around the directions the school board had already committed us to, which is basically site-based management."**
>
> **"Given the diversity of our school system, how do we ensure that we get all of our language groups, all of our racial groups, all of our socioeconomic groups? And that it isn't just based on the traditional parents that are vocal, but also those who we don't hear from for whatever reasons?"**
>
> **"How can you communicate to the parents that it's appropriate for them to get involved in a way that acknowledges the knowledge they have about their own child and their own culture?"**

DEFINING PARTNERSHIPS

Early in the partnership building process, a NAFSPP site consultant noted, "Parental partnership means something different to the principals, the teachers, the students, and parents." One Hmong community member offered suggestions for building family/school partnerships:

> **"You need different ways of involving parents. All parents are not going to want to go to conferences, but they may come to a Hmong parent meeting or they may go to an event that has a Hmong New Year's party or they may go to the bus mediation. We have trouble on some of our buses and Hmong parents learned how their kids can be bus mediators and help solve some of the problems on the buses. Parents came out for that. Those parents wanted something done about it."**

A school staff member observed:

> **"We've purposely chosen to define it as family involvement because the family has to be looked at in a much larger concept than the biological parents. Really, the primary adults that are responsible for that child's care and support may be extended family—aunts, uncles, grandparents, community groups. When the school as a system or the teacher is trying to develop a relationship with the family or with the child's family, they need to think more broadly than just reaching the parent."**

BUILDING ON COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The partnership building process with the Hmong community in Minneapolis was characterized by an effort to build upon existing school and community programs. Even before the project began, the schools already displayed a degree of cultural awareness. Hmong American Partnership had already begun to conduct Parent Skills workshops in at least two schools. More than 50 parents had attended a HAP workshop at the Fulton School.

The Hale Elementary School, under the leadership of both the principal and the Title VII coordinator, provided American history classes to Hmong parents in the Hmong language and Hmong history classes to all students. The Olson Elementary School held an annual Hmong New Year celebration that had consistently drawn more than 300 Hmong parents and children.

NAFSPP partnerships built upon the existing strengths of schools and community-based organizations by facilitating meetings to encourage more collaborative planning and coordinated efforts. The Olson School's project workplan expressed this underlying purpose:

> **"To involve Hmong PTO, HAP, Olson School, and Hale School in partnerships that will increase parent participation in the education of their children and in school activities. The major goals are for parents to form more interactive relationships with children and to increase student achievement."**

Project consultants observed that "in addition to HAP-sponsored parent skills programs, Hmong parents are actively involved in monthly parent meetings. They are also actively involved in Hmong PTO which meets at the same night as the regular PTO, but earlier in the evening. Hmong parents were encouraged to stay for the regular PTO meetings." Olson School principal Ann Widseth observed more and more Hmong parents staying for the mainstream PTA meeting.

The Olson School also co-sponsored the Hmong Youth Pride program for grades 4 to 6. Comprised of two-hour sessions, the Hmong Youth Pride program assisted students with homework while providing a parenting skills program. HAP also provided a Hmong children's program to offer academic, cultural, and recreational programs after school.

The Olson Elementary School and the Hmong American Partnership also collaborated on a new program to foster self-esteem and to curtail drug abuse. HAP met with Hmong students from grades 4 to 6 twice a week at the school. The school also hired a Hmong child development teacher to service all children—not just Hmong.

In response to requests by Hmong parents for academic and cultural support for parents and children, the schools began weekly programs to ensure academic success and safety for their children after school and to preserve their Hmong culture. Partnership project activities supplemented this regular school program. The Olson School conducted four family science sessions to provide opportunities for parents and students to interact through discussion and "hands-on" science activities. Parents became more aware of activities they could do with their children around the core area of science. For example, parents, teachers, and children visited a science museum with a permanent exhibit focusing on Hmong culture and daily life in Laos. The Hmong exhibit provided an opportunity for parents to share experiences of their native country with their children. The experience also exposed parents to an educational community resource.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

During the project, one school staff member described a Hmong leader as "too focused on his own agenda." While this may be an isolated incident, negative opinions of Asian community leaders presented barriers to the partnership building process.

Another school staff member was "somewhat upset" that the Hmong PTSO received project funds. The staff member felt capable of "designing programs to promote greater Hmong parents' involvement" on his own. This is but one example of how potential school/community partnerships might be constrained by the way schools—not community-based organizations—have historically controlled education resources. To create true community/school partnerships, new models of shared power and decision-making will need to be explored.

Another staff member was told by some parents and teachers that "too much time was devoted to the Hmong students and parents at the expense of the white children and parents." It was perceived that organizing a Hmong Parents PTA instead of devoting more effort to integrate Hmong parents into the existing PTA was "encouraging segregation." Such perceptions of the school's work with Hmong parents became problematic.

School schedules proved to be another barrier to parent participation. The president of HPTSO emphasized the importance of adapting schools to parents' schedules:

> **"The most difficult part for me as a PTO president is that I have my job at a company and I work from 9 to 5. When the school calls me and says, 'We have a meeting and we would like you to come at this time,' I must say, 'Well, I work until five.' And they say, 'Well, maybe that will be too late for us.'"**

MAKING CHANGES

At the end of the project period, one school site teacher said, "I've notice a lot of change in the last three years. Parents now come to me and say, 'Can we do this?' And I say, 'Yes, you can. You can always find a way to help your child.' "

After a visit to Minneapolis, a project consultants wrote:

> **"The overall assessment is one of truly significant results radiating a continuing process of growth and development of the goals in the proposal. The site is effervescing in energy, enthusiasm, and activity. This was evidenced by the spirit of cooperation and collaborative effort of CBOs and school personnel. School partnerships are being developed, political awareness and participation in democratic processes are in operation. Exciting individual achievements are creating access toward high educational opportunity and success for the Hmong community."**

SEATTLE: COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TAKE THE LEAD

> "As a major point of entry into the United States, Seattle has been a hub for the Filipino American migratory labor force in agriculture as well as in the Alaskan fishing canneries. The first Filipino men arrived in Seattle in 1904 to lay telephone wire between Seattle and Alaska. In 1909, the Jenkins family became the first Filipino American family in Seattle. The University of Washington became home for some 200 Filipino students in 1926."
>
> FRED CORDOVA
> FILIPINOS: FORGOTTEN ASIAN AMERICANS

When Filipino American parents first organized Filipino Youth Activities of Seattle, Inc. (FYA) in 1957, they chose the "tamaraw," resembling water buffaloes of Asia, for the FYA logo. Unlike the common water buffalo, the tamaraw has never been a beast of burden. Indigenous to the Philippines, the tamaraw still roams wild and free.

For succeeding generations of youth, the FYA would nurture a sense of pride and knowledge of Filipino heritage through folk dancing, sports, teen clubs, conferences, university internships, and tours with the FYA Drill Team, the nation's only Filipino American drill team.

Nearly 40 years later, former drill team members recall powerful learning experiences of being a part of the team. Wearing uniforms inspired by the only people never colonized in the Philippines, the FYA Drill Team created, performed, and marched to original rhythms—blending indigenous Filipino percussions with contemporary Afro-Latin beats. Traveling to cities throughout the U.S., they won countless awards as crowds stopped to watch. Like the proud tamaraw, they held their heads high.

One FYA parent and former board chair cites a "sense of family" to be FYA's strength as an organization. "Many of the older children spiritually adopt some of the younger children. The adults in the FYA are referred to as auntie and uncle, not just Mr. and Mrs. You instill that spiritual sense of family in children, no matter what the race. Lately, we have children whose grandparents have been involved in the program. So we see a continuation through each generation. We try to get all the family involved. Some don't. But through the enthusiasm of the child, they do come around."

In the 1990s, FYA faces the challenge of reaching a Filipino American community vastly different from the extended family network they once knew. With Filipinos numbering 48,000 in Washington state, most Filipino families in Seattle no longer know each other. A more diverse FYA staff—second and third generation Filipino Americans, immigrant professionals from the Philippines, some biracial, some with former gang affiliations—must create new programs to respond to issues that original FYA Folk Dancing and Drill Team programs did not address. FYA staff now make job referrals, translate in courts and hospitals, consult with gang prevention units, and provide guidance to students and teachers in Seattle public schools.

Building on the expertise drawn from its 39-year history, FYA took the lead in developing NAFSPP activities for the Seattle site. Yet the success of the project would not have been possible without the significant efforts of the Filipino American Parents Group of Cleveland High School (FAPG). This group, established before the project, would become a model for Filipino American parent groups in the Seattle area. According to FAPG bylaws, the organization's goals include:

> **"...supporting, promoting, and helping to facilitate successful performance of our children in all aspects of education—academically, scholastically, socially, morally, spiritually, and physically...to unify parental efforts for ensuring equitable services and privileges for students in school regardless of their ethnicity or economic background."**

For Filipino parents, FAPG provides mutual support in efforts to adapt parenting skills to U.S. school settings. For example, when FAPG members agreed to chaperone Cleveland High School's Winter Ball, other Filipino parents felt less anxiety about letting their children attend a mainstream school function, allowing many Filipino students to enjoy their first formal school dance. One parent described FAPG's purpose as, "Getting parents to have a voice in the school setting."

CONTEXT

In 1991, the Seattle Public School District reported a Filipino student population of 2,028 with 430 (21.2 percent) students below grade level and 353 in ESL programs. Seattle schools with large Filipino American populations typically include recent immigrants through fourth-generation U.S.-born students, Filipino American students of varied socioeconomic situations, those with urban or rural backgrounds, and biracial Filipino American students.

In an eight-year period (1983 to 1990), graduation rates of Filipino students in Seattle Public Schools dropped from nearly 94 percent to 74.2 percent. During that same period, the record of Filipino students' short-and long-term suspensions remained high. In 1990, of the 215 total suspensions documented for all Asian groups combined, Filipino high school students accounted for 54 short-term and 33 long-term suspensions—the highest number of suspensions of all Asian groups.

One FYA outreach worker described a case in which a large number of Filipino students were suspended. "They were suspected of being gang members. The school was afraid that if they stayed in school there would be more trouble with them and another gang." But one student responded, "It's not a gang. They're my *home-ies*, our friends. We treat each other like brothers and sisters." Another student said, "My counselor told me a while ago that the Filipinos are always the ones who start the fight because we go in groups." Conrado Rigor, FYA youth coordinator, noted, "School administrators see a group of immigrant kids banding together and they are free in using the term 'gang.' I guess that stems mainly from not being very well versed with the cultural variations or nuances of such a group."

A number of community organizations, including those represented by Evergreen Legal Services of Seattle, challenged the Seattle Public Schools to effectively serve students eligible for bilingual and ESL services. In October of 1994, a letter from the Seattle Public School District's superintendent stated, "...there are a number of gangs that are primarily based on ethnicity...grouping students by national origin will facilitate [gang] recruitment of those students." Responding with a memo, Evergreen Legal Services described the statement as a "blatant assertion that the Seattle School District will not provide limited English proficient (LEP) children educational services mandated by the state legislature to ensure equal educational opportunities because the district stereotypes immigrant and refugee children as likely gang members."

For various reasons, collaboration between community and school staff to develop NAFSPP activities did not include district administrators in Seattle. One FYA leader observed, "Administration within the Seattle Public Schools has to recognize that there are valuable organizations out there in the community that can be beneficial and help the schools and help the kids. Because that's the most important client—it's the students. We're there for the students."

LISTENING TO STUDENTS

Recognizing the importance of hearing from those often least represented in decisions affecting education, Seattle's partnership building process began with student meetings.

During a meeting with Filipino American community and school staff at Cleveland High School, one Filipino student expressed the need for parental support: "Push us, encourage us. Don't just say, 'You're on your own.' Be there for kids. Parents should ask, 'How was school? How was your day? How's homework?'" Another student asked, "What do you call that word when you put yourself in the students' spot? Empathy. Put yourself in the students' spot. School isn't the only thing that students think about—maybe not even 25 percent. Kids don't learn well when they have other problems and they're not concentrating on school." Other students commented on how busy their parents were, feeling that some were "constantly at work."

Students also provided suggestions on how to improve their education. Recalling some of the NAFSPP retreats, one student said, "We should have more programs like that. It gives us more chance to be closer as Filipino people." Another student suggested, "Teachers should help us out, not just with homework, but with life. You can't just expect kids to memorize stuff. You should emphasize writing, because that's the most important. Writing is cool, you can express what's in your mind, your ideas." When asked what schools and communities might do to improve education, one student simply said, "Just listen to us first. Listen to our side first before you do something."

A Filipino student meeting at Cleveland High School continued over the course of two consecutive days. Some 20 students attended the first meeting, then requested a second meeting that drew 33 students. Noting the high level of interest, the Filipino bilingual aide assured students, "We will have to continue these meetings even if the project is not here."

Seven months later, more than 40 Filipino students discussed significant issues in their lives as Cleveland High School teachers, the vice principal, parents, and community representatives from FYA listened and learned. Discussing issues in small groups facilitated by teachers or community leaders, students identified a wide range of concerns that included racism, school attendance, sexual harassment, goals, pregnancy, gang violence, parents' attention, divorced parents, family goals, relationships, finding a job, peer pressure, teen suicide. A number of young women described issues of sexual harassment.

One parent and community leader noted, "I've worked with Filipino American youth for over 40 years and from the workshop I learned a lot about students' changing values, and the changes in what young people consider to be their problems. Even as recently as five years ago, issues such as sexual harassment and abortion would only have been whispered."

Students hoped for more workshops: "It's hard for people to open up and express their feelings. Parents don't understand the influences children are under. The kids need a place to go. A retreat might help."

SKILL-BUILDING RETREATS

When parents, community, and school representatives met to develop a workplan to build family/school partnerships, the retreat proposed by students became a key event. FYA staff and consultants continued to meet with Cleveland High School staff, parents, and students with the of generating interest in a "Family Skills Building Retreat" planned by FYA.

Involving more than 50 parents and students, along with 15 school and community staff members, "Project Mag-Anak: Family Skills Building Retreat" was jointly funded by NAFSPP, FYA, the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, and the Seattle Department of Housing. Utilizing culturally sensitive curricula developed by FYA staff for this retreat, the event may serve as a model for work in the Seattle area and at the national level. Networking opportunities during the Project Mag-Anak retreat inspired teachers, parents, and staff of the Ingraham High School to form a Filipino Parent/Teacher/Student Organization, which continues to meet regularly. Responding to concerns raised by Cleveland High School parents and students, FYA organized a follow-up to the Project Mag-Anak retreat for more than 40 students, parents, and teachers who participated in a full day of workshops.

Later in the project, FYA staff met with representatives from the Filipino American Parents Group of Cleveland High School, Filipino American teachers of Ingraham High School, and representatives from new project sites, including Franklin High School, the Filipino Community of Seattle, and the Filipino American Political Advocacy Group of Washington. Discussions and presentations encouraged all to broaden the partnership to include representatives from new groups and embark on plans for an "Empowerment Retreat" developed by FYA.

On the day of the "Family/Youth Empowerment Workshop," a FYA staff member explained:

> **"This workshop is part of a larger project of the FYA, Project Mag-Anak/ Project Family. What we have been doing for about the last year and a half is to really start working more closely with family groups, family units, to make them functional, almost as a check, 'Where are we as a family?' We started out with a retreat last year that focused on identifying the problems. For parents and students, it was the first time they could say, 'Hey, this is what bothers me about you, mother or daughter or son.' We acknowledged that problems exist and that we could respect each other for our differences. And then, we signed contracts. That was the first step in reinforcing that strong family bond."**

During the workshop, one high school student gained new insights on his life upon hearing from parents:

> **"It makes me think of the negative things that I have done, like stealing, lying and I took all those for granted. And now, looking from the parents, I learned the negativeness and feel like I learned something out of that and now I'm trying to reach my goals of doing good stuff like getting good grades and obeying my parents. Before, I don't used to obey my parents. I used to talk back and don't do anything. And now that I'm growing up, getting old, I learned to be more responsible and listen to them."**

At the same event, an Ingraham High School teacher recognized the value of FYA's creative, interactive approach to issues: "The kids are really enjoying it. And the parents are doing the same. You are able to get things to be out in the open. I know one of the problems of a lot of our immigrant kids is being shy and feeling threatened to speak up. But in this way, it's more fun. Instead of having a confrontation, you solve problems in a fun way."

Many parents became very emotional during the workshop: "What I learned from what I experienced here is the close relationship between the parents and the kids. And maybe the kids saw how hard for the parents to give their love, to try to give them everything so they can have a good education, and to have a bright future." Some parents learned that they are not alone in their struggles: "You think that your kid is getting bad, but when you go into this group of people, you find out that your child is not the only one, that everybody has same problem, and you just have to work together."

Project groups also worked on collaborative efforts with other community-based organizations such as the Filipino American Educators of Washington, Filipino Community of Seattle, the Filipino Cultural Heritage Society of Washington, and the Filipino American Political Advocacy Group of Washington. Events included the Philippine Renaissance Project and a recognition event for all Filipino American high school graduates. The "Evening of Excellence" became the first event on which four area community-based organizations worked together to recognize Filipino American high school graduates from both public and private high schools in Seattle.

DEFINING PARTNERSHIPS

As various definitions of "partnership" evolved during the project, it was often assumed that, ideally, school teachers and administrators, staff of community-based organizations, and parents would work together collaboratively with decision-making power shared equally. Given that the ideal situation seldom exists, conflicts may arise over dynamics of power.

The issue of sharing leadership between long-established organizations and newer groups emerged in the Seattle project. Given FYA's history of service to Filipino American youth in Seattle, the relationship between the FYA and Filipino American Parents of Cleveland High School was unclear. One member of Filipino American Parents of Cleveland High asked, "Is there only top-down leadership?" Dynamics involving different perceptions of power and leadership roles gave rise to the question: "What should be the relationship between an established community based organization and a new group?" The answer is still being worked out.

The Seattle family/school partnership building process illustrates a model in which schools and strong community-based organizations work independently towards the same goal: supporting students' educational achievement. While schools and community organizations often worked on parallel tracks, opportunities such as the retreat allowed all groups to work closely together.

PARENTS AS RESOURCES

To make school more meaningful to students and parents, bilingual teacher Angelita Pizarro suggested, "Use parents as resources. Find role models. Humanities classes, for example, might have a famous Filipino business man. Parents from rural areas with experiences on farms or with fish ponds might lead students in teaching how to fish, plant, grow."

Ted Howard, Cleveland High School principal agreed: "Having role models of the same nationality makes a big difference. Someone of the same nationality who understands your plight—it helps."

At Seattle's Cleveland High School, a "Fish and Roses" curriculum utilizes an actual fish hatchery and rose garden as the basis for an integrated, hands-on curriculum in science, language, art, math, and social studies that invites parents to discuss related areas of their own expertise—fishing or gardening. Hence, parental involvement extends beyond simply "preparing multicultural food." Cleveland principal Ted Howard described how parents are valued for their expertise: "We use parents for their expertise in the classroom, ones who know about the tilapia in the Philippines. We allow them to be experts for our kids. So they go into the classroom and they're proud."

PROJECT CONSTRAINTS

Some Filipino American community leaders feel that within the Asian designation, Filipinos are not always served, citing examples of how other Asian teachers serve Filipino American students. One Filipino American community leader said: "Too many times, we run into problems when districts feel they've solved the 'Asian problem' when they hire one Asian staff. And I, for one, am Filipino American—not Asian—and do not profess to have expertise on all groups within the Asian category."

A FYA staff member felt that one constraint in the partnership building process grew out of an elitist perspectives on authority in which academic credentials are held in higher regard than "grassroots" experience: "FYA's involvement in schools is at the nitty gritty level of intervention—when students are in trouble. But we're not called on as guest speakers at conferences." At one school site, some members of the Cleveland High School staff questioned why this project served "only Filipino students."

Dynamics of partnership building posed challenges to all key players. The process of attempting to organize various events collaboratively underscored the importance of distributing work fairly, as well as being explicit about responsibilities for following up on loose ends. FYA staff raised the issue, saying: "In partnerships, some groups do all the work, and other groups get the credit."

NEXT STEPS

A number of Seattle community leaders and school staff described the NAFSPP Project process as one of "planting seeds"—building networks and promoting programs designed to create opportunities for student success. For example:

- Seattle Public School District statistics for 1994 documented that the number of short-term suspensions for Filipino high school students decreased from 11 percent in 1992–93 to 8 percent in 1993–94. The number of long-term suspensions for Filipino high school students decreased from 9 percent in 1991–92 to 5 percent in 1993–94. The total number of Filipino American students in all Seattle public schools increased slightly from 2,126 (4.7 percent) in 1992–93 to 2,174 (4.8 percent) in 1993–94.
- Various community organizations, in addition to FYA, demonstrated an increased level of involvement in addressing youth and parent issues.
- FYA workshops and retreats created new parent/student bonds and identified a core of student leaders who are currently active in their community.
- According to the *Filipino Bulletin* of May, 1995, the city of Seattle awarded the Filipino Community of Seattle, Inc. (FCSI), one of the project partners, a grant of more than $40,000 to support programs designed to address needs of Filipino American youth—the first time in its 60-year history that the FCSI has received a grant for such work. The proposal was a collaborative effort among community leaders involved with NAFSPP.

DES MOINES: STRIVING TO BE EQUAL PARTNERS

"We need to bring the school and community closer together, and they need to be on an equal level."

SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR, DES MOINES, IOWA

In 1975, leaders of Thaidam people residing in Vietnam wrote letters to several U.S. governors requesting places to settle in the United States. Receiving a welcome letter from the governor of Iowa, some 600 Thaidam settled there. With about 3,000 Thaidam currently residing in the state, including more than 90 percent of the original group, Iowa remains home of the only concentrated Thaidam community in the United States.

Nearly 20 years later, families descended from the first Thaidam settlers gathered at a conference designed to assist parents to become better advocates for their children. Co-sponsored by NCAS, Des Moines Public Schools, the Society of Thaidam American Friendship, and the Thaidam community, the event attracted parents, youth, counselors, teachers, and school district administrators.

Speaking to the conference, Dinh Van Lo, bilingual community liaison and president of the Society of Thaidam American Friendship, described a tree's life to emphasize the importance of cultural roots: "When you see a beautiful apple tree, you see beautiful fruit. But if you cut the roots of the apple tree, the apple tree will die. So if you cut the roots, you don't know who you are. You don't know what you are. You are not proud of what you are. You will not succeed. So be proud of what you are. You are Thaidam. And Thaidam are good people."

Lo's reference to a tree's roots as a symbol of cultural heritage fit well into the rustic setting of the 4-H Education Camp in Madrid, Iowa. Surrounded by trees, Thaidam parents, children, and school staff of many cultural backgrounds listened quietly, shaping new meanings—perhaps common themes—from their own experiences of uprooting, resettling, and creating places for nurturing children's growth.

One school administrator described her growing awareness of the importance of listening: "The training session taught me, 'When you go into these homes, knocking at their doors, visiting, making home visits with these families, go with this in mind—be listeners.' Sometimes all you need to do is just listen. It works both ways. The parents—sometimes we need to take the time to listen to our children, especially middle-school-aged children. Listen and respect one another. If we want our children to respect us, we need to respect them as well, and consider things from another point of view."

Listening and considering new perspectives characterized the partnership building process between the Thaidam community and Des Moines Public Schools. After introductory meetings between teachers, counselors, school district administrators and program staff, Thaidam parents and other community members created a diverse committee of representatives first known as the Central Committee for the NCAS Project. Meeting consistently to plan programs and events, representatives worked collaboratively to allow all the voices around the planning table to be heard with equal power. The committee's success provided many new insights into creating family/school partnerships by means of leadership with diverse perspectives.

CONTEXT

The Thaidam's shared history, their concentrated population in the capital city of Iowa, and the "village" character of Des Moines all influenced the partnership building process.

The Des Moines Public School District reported an official enrollment of 31,405 in 1993–94. Minority students comprised 21.5 percent of the district's total. The district's enrollment of Asian students grew from 4.3 percent in 1989–90 to 5.1 percent in 1993–94. More than 1,100 students participated in the district's English as a Second Language and bilingual programs.

NCAS selected Adams Elementary School, Harding Middle School, and North High School to participate in the National Asian Family/School Partnership Project. With approximately 140 Asian students, Harding serves as one of the feeder schools for North High School. Situated in one of the most concentrated Southeast Asian neighborhoods in Des Moines, North High's student population is 14 percent Southeast Asian.

According to Thaidam community leaders, there are three official Thaidam organizations in Iowa: the Kadsan Thai Dam Society, the Society of Thaidam-American Friendship (SOTAF), and the Tai Studies Center. The Tai Studies Center's projects include the development of Tai history and literacy books. Since Thaidam never had a written alphabet or any printed textbooks, children learned the language from their families.

INFLUENCE OF HOMELAND ISSUES

For many Asian Americans, issues that affect their Asian homeland have considerable impact on communities in the United States. During the spring of 1993, members of the Tai Studies Center (TSC) expressed concern about the situation in their homeland, Northwest Vietnam, where Iowa's Thaidam originated. Since a considerable number of Thaidam still live in that region, the Des Moines Thaidam community is concerned about the Vietnamese government's plan to build a dam in the Thaidam homeland. If the government is successful, the Thaidam community in Vietnam may be wiped out. The Tai Studies Center is working to stop the Vietnamese government from building the dam by reaching out to lawmakers in the United States and other countries.

When the Tai Studies Center took a very active role in advocating for changes in their homeland, the NCAS representative sensed that the Thaidam community was somewhat divided on the issue of what to do to help people in their homeland. While some supported the Tai Studies Center's position, others felt that the TSC had taken the wrong direction in dealing with the situation. Some feared for the safety of Thaidam people in Vietnam. The Tai Studies Center's subsequent decision to withdraw from the NCAS project because of its commitment to the political situation in their homeland vividly illustrates how issues affecting Asians abroad can influence U.S. Asian communities.

THE SOCIETY FOR THAIDAM AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP

> *"We are a caring, honest, and viable group of people making a significant impact on the lives of the Thaidam people, both as individuals and as a group, and on the American society as a whole, so we can be proud to be called Thaidam-American."*
>
> SOTAF'S VISION STATEMENT

Organized in 1977 and incorporated as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization in 1983, the Society of Thaidam-American Friendship's (SOTAF) primary goals are mutual assistance and resettlement. Today, SOTAF is a visible and well-respected organization in Iowa communities, receiving in 1987 the annual Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Services to the state of Iowa.

According to SOTAF publications, Society membership includes more than 262 families, among them more than 800 adults and 1,000 children or young adults. More than 50 percent of SOTAF members live in the greater Des Moines or surrounding areas; the other 50 percent live in other cities or states.

Through an effective network of government agencies, churches, sponsors, friends, and the SOTAF organization, efforts to help Thaidam resettlement in America have successfully minimized the trauma experienced by refugees, helping them to become proud and productive American citizens.

STRIVING TO BE EQUAL PARTNERS

To introduce the National Asian Family/School Partnership Project to the Thaidam community, the NAFSPP representative met with Tai Studies Center staff to explore possible project activities. The consultant then convened a joint meeting with school principals, district administrators, teachers, and community leaders. These 20 participants discussed plans for ongoing outreach to parents, Thaidam community leaders, and schools to define issues and develop relevant workshops and programs. This was the first meeting of the group that would eventually be known as the Central Committee for the project.

The consultant noted that "a sense of responsibility, shared ownership, and leadership" characterized the beginning of the partnership building process. He cited school representatives' commitment to join subcommittees and be actively involved in NAFSPP's implementation, as well as the Thaidam community's willingness to seek additional funds for new, school-related community programs. Since the project's inception, diverse representation, strong administrative support, and conscious efforts to create a partnership of "equal voice and power" characterized the Central Committee's work. During the partnership building process, Central Committee members would learn that being open to new perspectives is a key element of striving for "equal power."

OPENING TO NEW TRADITIONS

Tension arose between the schools and Thaidam community-based organizations when the Central Committee decided to hold a workshop for Thaidam parents on Thanksgiving weekend. Since the workshop was held on a holiday weekend, no school representatives were able to attend. Some mainstream school representatives felt that the choice of Thanksgiving weekend excluded those who celebrated the traditional holiday. Some committee members told the site consultant that only a few Central Committee members attended the planning meeting for the November workshop. When asked why the workshop was held on Thanksgiving weekend, the director of the Tai Studies Center commented, "Thanksgiving holiday is a good time for families to meet for our community, and the schools should respect that. We can't do the same way the schools always do."

Members of the Board of Directors of the Tai Studies Center felt that the November workshop was very successful. Drawing more than 50 parents, the workshop focused on the value of education for the Thaidam community. Included among the speakers were overseas Thaidam guests who described education systems in different countries.

At a meeting with SOTAF representatives, school principals, the director of the district's intercultural programs, the bilingual community liaison, and school teachers, school representatives questioned the value of partnerships in light of the decision to hold the parent workshop on Thanksgiving weekend. As a result, the group decided the Central Committee would be restructured with the goal of involving all key players in future projects. Later that year, at the Thaidam Family/School Workshop, one school official assured the Thaidam community that they wanted to work with the community as equal partners.

The NAFSPP representative's presence helped to ease tension between the schools and community-based organizations. At this time, the Tai Studies Center asked to withdraw from the project to devote more time to the political situation in their homeland. After several community leaders and school representatives met to discuss the next steps in the partnership building process, all recommended that the Society of Thaidam-American Friendship (SOTAF) be designated as the lead organization for the project, particularly since SOTAF had been involved since the project's inception.

THE POWER OF COMMITMENT

The Des Moines Central Committee—comprised of Thaidam parents and community members, and the administrative and teaching staff of North High, Adams

Elementary, and Harding Middle schools—identified key issues: awareness of school staff of different cultures; developing handbooks for parents and staff; designing a special summer program for families before the start of the next school year; and funding a school/community project, especially for Thaidam youngsters. After months of meeting with parents, teachers, students, and other community leaders, the NAFSPP/SOTAF/Des Moines Public Schools collaboration printed the following statements in a handout for a meeting at North High School:

> **"The Thaidam parents and community are very concerned with the future and the education of their youth, the limited participation of the parents in the school activities, and the parents' limited knowledge of school activities. The Thaidam parents' and community goals are:**
>
> - **To assist Thaidam students to be successful in education and become productive American citizens.**
> - **To provide ways for networking between students, parents, schools, and the communities.**
> - **To provide literacy and cultural heritage classes.**
> - **To organize positive prevention activities against drugs, gangs, and school dropouts.**
>
> **The Thaidam parents' and community objectives are:**
>
> - **To set up committees and subcommittees to be a link or to plan and assist in providing training/workshops for parents/students.**
> - **To provide training and workshops for students in the areas of college financial aid, vocational career choices, drugs, gangs, life, cross-cultural issues, etc.**
> - **To provide cultural and sports activities to students and parents, such as tennis, basketball, soccer, Ping-Pong tournaments, New Year celebrations, fashion shows, picnics, weekend retreats, and other events.**
> - **To provide literacy and cultural heritage classes as part of the school curriculum (during study hall or special session conducted by paid or volunteer staff).**
> - **To offer weekend literacy and culture heritage classes for all students through adult education."**

Although the Central Committee continued to meet regularly, during the week in which a half-day training session was scheduled, severe winter weather conditions prompted the closing of schools and the subsequent cancellation of a school staff workshop. Despite the frigid weather, the NAFSPP representative arrived in Des Moines on the last flight before conditions shut down the Des Moines airport. Upon arriving he was told by the school district's community liaison: "Since you could come all the way from Boston to Des Moines in this weather, we must be able at least to hold a planning meeting."

So great was the Thaidam community's commitment to the project that ten community members and one school principal ventured out during dangerously cold weather to attend the Central Committee's January planning meeting. During this same visit, the school district liaison also managed to arrange a meeting with an associate superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools. The NAFSPP representative found the associate superintendent to be "very sincere with his commitment to the community and minority student issues."

The Central Committee continued to plan activities throughout the spring. Adams Elementary School held a successful parent workshop in which 25 ESL families participated in discussions of health, homework, and general problems in school. One teacher commented, "Thaidam parents were among many enthusiastic parents who participated." More than 65 families took part in a cultural fair the following month.

One highlight of the partnership building year in Des Moines was the successful Thaidam Family/School Workshop held at North High School. More than 50 parents, teachers, principals, the superintendent and associate superintendent, program directors and Thaidam community leaders generated ideas and a workplan to complete specific tasks related to the partnership project. The school district's commitment to the project was reflected in its willingness to contribute resources such as staff time, meeting space, materials, and promotion of the value of the Thaidam community and culture.

PARENT ADVOCACY WORKSHOPS

> "The way I look at this program, you want to empower the Thaidam community to make a voice. You should have a training on how to raise your voice and organize yourself. That kind of training we need. I have small children going to school. We need to train parents who have children going to school now."
>
> THAIDAM PARENT

Utilizing resource materials collected from the project's network, the NAFSPP representative suggested projects and activities that the Thaidam community might initiate as part of the partnership building process. For example, at a community meeting, the consultant presented an outline of community needs in California to serve as a possible starting point in workshop planning. Parents' rights cards from Philadelphia provided one source of information for the Thaidam community. Teachers received Minneapolis State Department of Education guidelines for working with LEP students.

The project site consultant emphasized the importance of advocacy, telling the participants: "Other groups have strong advocates. I want newcomers everywhere to re-examine the words 'equal opportunity education,' and realize how much they are discriminated against because of the color of their skin and the language they speak."

After the school district's community liaison arranged a special meeting between the project representative and the associate superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools, the liaison was pleased to find that the superintendent "pledged his support to the project and welcomed any invitation to project activities. He also affirmed that he would instruct his staff to continue working with NCAS and the Thaidam community." The school district administrator's positive response to the project proved to enhance partnership building. The project representative noted that the administrator's cooperation "showed very clearly the effect of the project on the school's awareness of Asian students. This helped raise the level of interest on Asian issues and helped to put those issues at the center of discussion."

Another important factor that enhanced partnership building was the flexibility the school district's community liaison was given to schedule and to participate in various community meetings away from school sites. The liaison's credibility with both the Thaidam community and the school district also enhanced the process.

BEYOND CULTURAL AWARENESS

The Central Committee planned a number of activities and programs to promote cultural awareness. Yet cultural awareness was not the only outcome of these events. The process of planning, organizing, and implementing programs led parents to new levels of participation in their children's education. For example, teachers from Harding School considered taking kids to a school dance and having parents chaperone so that they would be more involved in the school. Since started last year, members were invited by the principal. Parents were also invited to serve on the school site council and were given considerable authority to help make decisions about school programs and other activities.

One assembly at North High became an opportunity to "celebrate the thousands who live every day working and praying nonviolently for respect and equality." To introduce the program, the principal reflected on how Nelson Mandela once prayed: "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to see realized. But, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

At the assembly, school staff declared, "We are here to celebrate the people who have sacrificed everything—even their lives—to keep that ideal alive." The Thaidam community responded, "We are here to show you the unique languages, clothes, music and spirit that shapes us into a people of diversity; into a people not afraid to share differences; into a people who borrow from each other's cultures in the belief that knowledge will set us free to love and to admire the uniqueness that we see on every face at North High School."

> *"I would say that the Thaidam parents have always been very interested and active in what's going on with their kids. I think because the Thaidam people are a people without a country, it makes them even stronger to do the best that they can and to make sure that their children advance."*
>
> SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

REFLECTIONS

Many school staff, parents, and students reflected on the meaning of partnership in light of the project. One administrator noted, "We became closer friends; we got to know each other better. I think it will cut through some of the nervousness of coming to school. Maybe the fact that we were here together away from school will make it easier for parents to come in. I certainly understand parents better. It's really good to sit in a group and be the language minority, to get the perspective of how it feels from the other side, and it helps me to understand hesitation to speak on the part of parents. And I think it helps parents break through that—it breaks the nervousness that they might have about talking to school people."

One teacher from Adams School felt that parents were now less intimidated and felt more comfortable coming to school to do things with their children: "We're one small group out here in the middle of Iowa, but when we get involvement from a national group and get information from a national level about other programs going on in the country, we then know if we're going in the right direction. We get ideas for things that we can change or new things we can bring in. It's wonderful stimulation."

As a way to document and promote the successful partnership building process in Des Moines, the group developed and published their own parent partnership handbook entitled "A Guide for Thaidam Parents' Involvement."

Benefits for Thaidam Students from Parental Involvement

- More positive attitudes and behavior.
- Appreciation of the Thaidam culture and background.
- Higher self-esteem.Better communication with their parents, teachers, and administrators.
- Greater enrollment in post secondary education.

Benefits for Schools

- Higher Thaidam student achievement and involvement in school extra-curricular activities.
- Greater cultural understanding of the Thaidam family by school staff.
- More Thaidam parents volunteer to assist with school activities.
- Increased contact with Thaidam parents and community.

Benefits for Thaidam Parents/Community

- Parents feel the school really cares about the education of their children.
- Parents feel welcome in school and during school sponsored activities.
- Parents know their rights and responsibilities and who to contact at school for services and information.
- Parents are more aware of school services (e.g. tran~lation, counseling, and scholarships).

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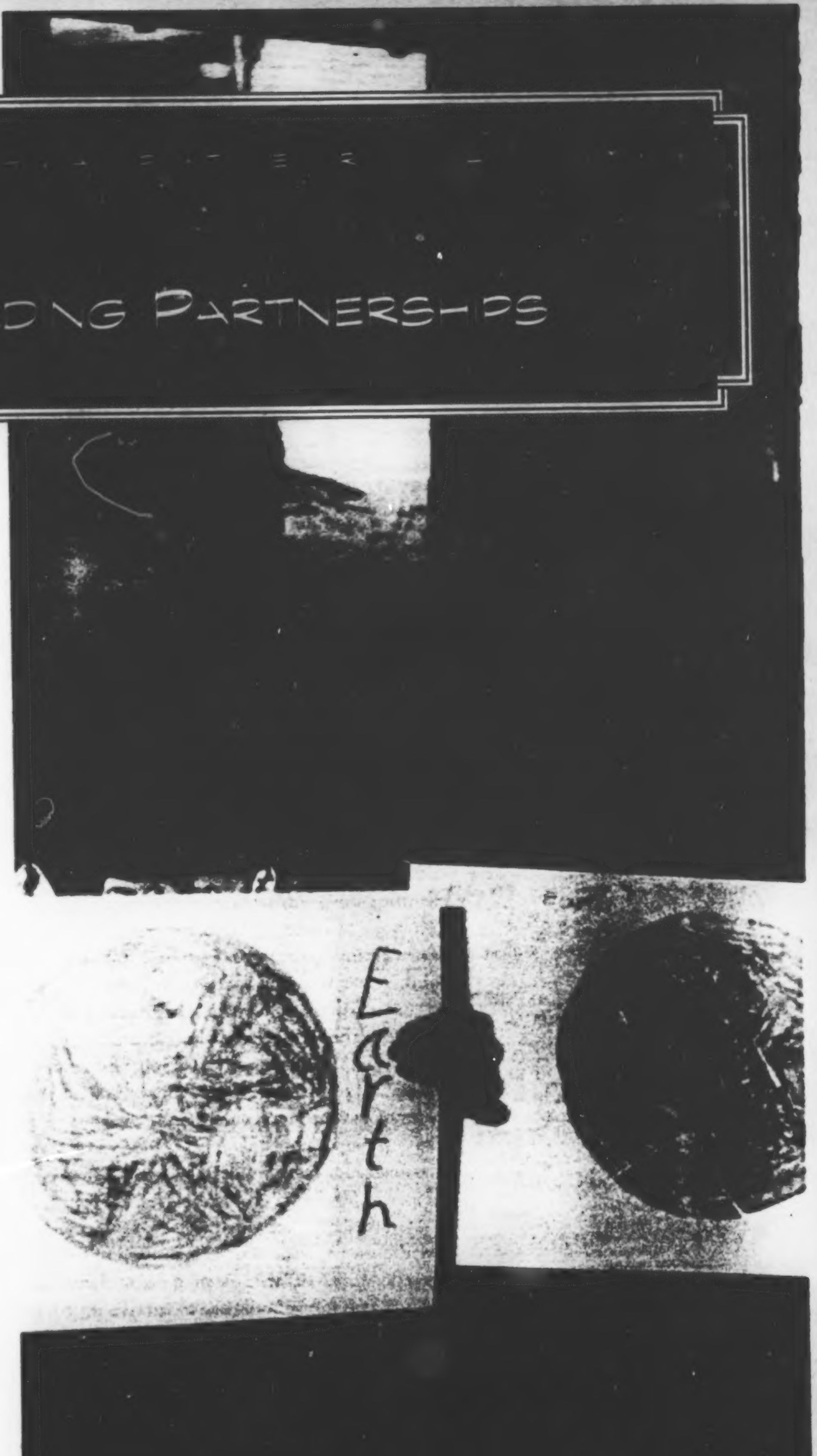
BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS



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> **"A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity." (Dewey, 1916, p. 87)**

For most newcomers, participation in their children's education is an essential part of becoming American. It is necessary that both newcomer parents and their children learn the history, responsibilities, and obligations implicit in becoming participating U.S. citizens for the nation to realize its full potential for democracy.

Asian newcomer parents want their children to understand civic duty. Many have lived under dictatorships, monarchies, communism, colonialism, and occupation by foreign military forces. Refugees have lived without a country. These parents came to this country in search of brighter futures for their children. They do not want their children to grow up knowing only a televised version of freedom. Rather, they want their children to understand freedom through comparative knowledge that includes their own homeland's history. However, Asian students new to this country are often attracted by the high degree of personal freedom in U.S. teen culture. When this occurs, it is important for parents, schools, and communities to work together to help young people consider the responsibilities that accompany freedom.

If schools are serious about engendering the full participation of Asian immigrant parents in the life of the school, they must lay aside traditional assumptions regarding parental involvement. In most schools, "parent involvement" means that professionals assume they know what parents need, and establish largely passive roles and responsibilities for parents. Schools should avoid this approach by being as concerned about learning the needs of parents as they are about making parents aware of school needs. The task of building mutual respect for differing cultures and life experiences must include both parents and educators. Parental involvement and the clear articulation of their needs are critical to curriculum and program development.

Mutual trust, respect, and understanding between all parties are essential to building positive relationships between parents and schools. Genuine partnership begins with the assumption of inherent capability and potential of all partners based on shared principles. Many school administrators need to rethink the goals and objectives of parent involvement and consider whether their purpose is simply to garner parents' support of the existing system or to help parents become true and effective advocates for their children and communities. As a Chicago community leader noted, "Parents, students, and schools must work as one unit, not as three separate entities."

Rather than viewing parents as deficient—and their home cultures as inadequate for the proper academic preparation of their children—families ought to be viewed as repositories of "the essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge and information that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive" (Moll, 1992).

BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

As noted earlier, the reasons why some Asian immigrant children do not regularly attend school can be traced to several basic sources: issues of self-esteem; harassment and other violations of student's rights; peer pressure; the enticements of freedom; and culturally inappropriate curricula. While some parents may learn how to respond to these challenges, for others, advice and guidance might not be very useful unless it is grounded in the parents' home culture.

Many parents feel their children are less respectful and responsible in the U.S. than children are—or were—back home. As one parent explained, "TV and things like that influence their minds and make them not like school any more. At the same time, we have to look at how many Cambodian kids really interact with non-Cambodian kids. It's very rare. We see a lot of Cambodian kids hanging out only with Cambodians. I think, sometimes, parents don't want to let the kids go, want to hold back, and want them to be Cambodian, rather than Cambodian-American."

One young man, who was born in Cambodian but grew up in the United States, said, "To be a Cambodian-American kid means you've grown up here, but you still look Cambodian. You do not live in Cambodia any more; you're here to stay. Sooner or later you will go out and work and start paying taxes and vote for the government. So you have to adapt yourself. If you hold yourself back, you're never going to get into the mainstream."

It is important for Asian immigrant students to have ample opportunities to interact with their native-born peers in extracurricular settings, but this may be difficult to achieve for several reasons:

- Asian immigrant students may not identify with the sports, clubs, or student government activities that are offered in U.S. schools.
- Some popular activities—such as cheerleading or girls' soccer—may be viewed by parents as culturally inappropriate.
- Immigrant girls may be reluctant to change their clothes or to take showers in open locker rooms.
- Parents may be reluctant to have their children participate in after-school or evening activities, particularly when it involves travel, because they are worried about safety.
- Some parents may not be able to provide transportation
- Parents may be unable to contribute to team activities because of conflicting work or home responsibilities, or because they are unfamiliar with the roles parents are expected to play.

Schools, parents, and community organizations need to work together to identify students who are bored or alienated when they spend large amounts of time in classes taught in a language they do not fully understand, such as academic English or the majority language of their country of origin, or classes that use curricula with little relationship to their own lives. Due to a national shortage of qualified bilingual instructors, instruction that is well designed to facilitate immigrant students' transition to English is often lacking. In many school systems, teaching materials for most language groups other than English are outdated. As a result, many students are deprived of bilingual role models or adequate instruction materials.

ESTABLISHING TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Parents often worry that their children do not listen to them, or when they do listen, children fail to follow advice because they believe they know better. It is not unusual for immigrant children to feel embarrassed by their parents' lack of English language skills and obvious cultural differences, and for them to assume their parents don't know anything relevant to their education.

School staff commonly advise all parents to listen to their children, but this is often easier said than done. One of the most popular books in the "how to be a better parent" genre is *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen, and Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. This book was written, in part, as a response to a letter from a woman in New Delhi who wrote to Faber and Mazlish, "There are so many problems about which I would like to take your advice. The old ways do not suit me, and I do not have the new skills." The challenge articulated by this Indian mother is the same faced by many Asian immigrant parents in the U.S. The old ways do not work and the new ways are unknown. In their book, Faber and Mazlish demonstrate through cartoons how "to break the cycle of unhelpful talk that has been handed down from generation to generation, and pass on a different legacy to our children — a way of communicating that they can use for the rest of their lives with their friends, their co-workers, their parents, their mates, and, one day, with children of their own."

According to Faber and Mazlish, in order to encourage a child to listen and respect a parent, the parent must first model this behavior by listening to and respecting what the child has to say. A parent must first show that he or she has listened thoughtfully to the child so the child knows the parent has heard and thought about what was said. This often means the parent must repeat what the child has said over and over, using slightly different vocabulary and considering the child's perspective. This is not easy when the child is growing up in a different culture than the parent. These problems seem to grow rather than diminish with time and seem to become critical when the student is in middle school.

LEARNING THE HOME LANGUAGE

Lack of a common primary language exacerbates problems of intergenerational communication in many Asian American homes. Communication difficulties result when children learn English more rapidly than their parents and reject or lose fluency in their parents' language. At the same time, parents may lack English language skills.

Students, especially older ones, may want to learn their parents' language but fear trying because they do not want their parents to laugh at them. One student explained, "I would love to learn my culture, the language, the reading and writing and so forth. It's just that I'm afraid that I'll fail, and why even try if I'm going to fail? I mean, that's wrong, but it's the truth" Another student said, "I want to try to learn, but I'm afraid that if I say it wrong, my mom or dad would laugh at me, so I don't want to try." Silence is a common response to fear in many cultures. A student explained that because she did not want to be laughed at, "I just keep quiet, saying nothing." Another youngster explained, "Kids don't want to be laughed at, so they keep quiet. At home, if they say something funny or stupid, then they are embarrassed."

In the refugee camps in Thailand, students who became literate in their home language were able to learn English more easily. It was assumed this was caused by a better understanding of the nature of language. For this and other reasons, it is important for community-based programs to provide students with an opportunity to learn their parents' language without fear of being laughed at in the home.

Many communities offer language classes in primary home languages. These programs are successful as long as the vocabulary is relevant to the lives of young people. Unfortunately, the response of some parents to their children who want to learn their home language is, "We're going to show you who you are," believing, as one parent said, that their children "have to find out who they are, or otherwise they are lost." This approach may negate the value of the students' own life experiences when they differ greatly from those of their parents.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVED COMMUNICATION

At a number of project sites, family retreats offered by community-based organizations facilitated family communication. Retreats provided students and parents with an opportunity to talk about difficult issues. The director of one community-based organization found that "parents wanted to express their love for their children better. They have been looking for support and encouragement from their peers. Simultaneously, the children are doing the same. They want more words of loving and caring from their parents. It was hard for both sides to express these words to one another."

At a retreat in Seattle, Filipino parents and their children felt it "was the first time parents and students could say, 'Hey, this is what bothers me about mother, daughter, or son,' and what we did was acknowledge that problems exist and that we could respect each other for our differences. That was the first step in reinforcing that strong family bond." After listening to his parents, one high school student said, "It makes me think of the negative things that I have done, like stealing, lying, and I took all those for granted. And now, looking from the parents perspective, I learned the negativeness and feel like I learned something and now I'm trying to reach my goals of doing good stuff like getting good grades and obeying my parents. I used to talk back and didn't do anything. Now that I'm growing up, getting older, I've learned to be more responsible and listen to them."

Sensitivity must be exercised when organizing retreats and other meetings for specific immigrant groups. For example, Cambodians may be reluctant to participate in group exercises because of personal experiences during the Pol Pot regime. The settings of the retreats must be carefully chosen because many refugees were either detained or hid for long periods in forests—the very type of settings often considered appropriate for a retreat. Additionally, the used of physical contact as a means to generate trust at retreats may be inappropriate in many cultures.

Filipino parents at the project's Seattle retreat found comfort in sharing concerns with other parents. One said, "You think your kid is getting bad, but when you get into this group of people, you find out that your child is not the only one, that everybody has the same problem, and you just have to work together." These meetings also provided parents with a place to talk about their children. One parent explained, "I grew up in a family that figured that you're not supposed to talk about your family's problems. So I was very surprised to hear other parents talk about their children's problems."

BUILDING MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT

Learning to listen to parents and community representatives is important for school personnel at all levels. Teachers who are successful at working in multicultural classrooms are those who have learned to become both teacher and learner. "Mutual respect and trust is the key" to successful communication between families and schools (Walker-Moffat, 1995).

Respect and trust among individuals grows over time as a result of evidence that people act in ways that match their words. Trust between families and schools grows in the same way—over time and with experience. Asian immigrant parents may come into the relationships with U.S. schools feeling as though it is an "us versus they" situation. Initially, they may feel unwelcome and are unlikely to have a sense of ownership of schools or school programs. These feelings can be overcome, but building trust takes time.

Schools should take proactive steps to overcome parents' reluctance to participate. For example, it is important that the school consistently communicate with parents in the language of the home. School administrators and teachers should have an accurate understanding of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of individual students and their families. When this understanding does not exist, negative outcomes may be inadvertently generated. Some school districts have assigned immigrant children to bilingual classrooms in languages the children do not speak. Others send printed materials home in the wrong Southeast Asian language; for example, Mien families have received school communications in Vietnamese. When this occurs, parents feel insulted, and it is difficult for them to feel respected by or to trust those who have caused such feeling. This is exacerbated by school personnel who are not aware that Southeast Asians living in the same U.S. community may have a history of political enmity in their homelands.

Relationships between families and schools frequently go awry as a result of common misunderstandings. Statements by school personnel are often regarded as promises. For example, school personnel may try to impress parents with their willingness to respond to parents' expressed needs for more bicultural/bilingual staff by saying, "Yes, we will try to hire someone." Asian parents may regard this as a promise. The failure to hire someone is subsequently understood as a broken promise.

On the other hand, non-Asian school staff may make wrong assumptions about Asian parents. For example, the failure of many immigrant parents to attend evening school functions may be interpreted by teachers as evidence that the parents don't care about the education of their children, or are incapable of participation. The real reason may have nothing to do with the ascribed reason. The reason may be that high crime rates in poor communities where immigrants settle cause parents to fear leaving their homes and possessions unprotected at night. Some parents might work during night shifts; others might have two jobs, preventing them from attending evening functions.

In the interest of generating trust and respect between schools and immigrant families, teachers and administrators should avoid making assumptions about parental behavior. It is better to talk directly with parents or students than to assume they do not care about the school or their children's education. School staff must have a basic understanding of different cultures in order to work effectively with immigrant families. One way to help school staff develop this understanding is to hire bilingual and bicultural staff. Another is to provide in-service education on cultural diversity on a regular basis to all school employees, including teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, cafeteria employees, maintenance workers, and support staff. At a minimum, this in-service education should explain who the newcomers are and what events may have caused their families to come to the United States. A more developed program should identify common patterns and themes between the experiences of newcomers and the immigration histories of school staff.

Parents feel respected by school personnel when they are treated with the same courtesies they would extend to guests in their homes:

- Communicate in languages that everyone understands.
- Converse in a dialogue, rather than through one-sided statements.
- Seek and value parents' views, and address their concerns honestly.
- Regard parents as experts on subjects relevant to their life experiences
- Provide children with the best the school can offer to support their efforts to succeed academically.

SUPPORTING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

All too often, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators act as if they were the ultimate authorities on the wellbeing of school children. Many well-intended school personnel believe that their own good will is enough to empower parents. These attitudes are based on a belief that newcomer parents are deficient in the knowledge of how to raise their children. Such an approach may include subtle or not-so-subtle discrimination by race and class. In reality, immigrant parents bring considerable power and resources to schools. Most have skillfully raised their children in their own cultures. They have marshaled significant psychological and economic resources to survive unknown challenges, to leave the familiar, and to come to a new country. They are making difficult adjustments to a new culture and new language.

Immigrants have had a variety of experiences with authority figures. Because many of the experiences were negative, parents may be unwilling to confront individuals or institutions who present themselves as powerful authority figures. The challenge to school personnel as they work with Asian immigrant communities is to: acknowledge the considerable determination, experience, and skills that families have already demonstrated; establish high expectations for parents based upon that acknowledgment; and develop family/school partnerships based upon the experiences and expertise parents bring to school.

Kenji Ima, a professor at San Diego State University who has researched Lao youth, observed, "Most of our Lao parents are deeply concerned with the education of their children, but many of them are not familiar with the American educational system and instructional programs. Many parents still assume that the education of their children is the sole responsibility of the school. Because successful education is a key factor in whether or not children later become productive members of the community, it is crucial for parents to understand how to guide their children through the school system. To avoid a legacy of dependence, it is important to develop leadership within the Lao community and support self-help activities that truly empower the Lao community. Most Lao parents have not understood the American view of the parents' role in education. Most have accepted a passive role and choose to accept educators as experts and are reluctant to say anything contrary to teachers fearing they may be speaking out of turn. In the United States, we have the right and obligation to be involved in our children's education and contribute to the betterment of the local school for the benefit of our children." A Filipina parent in Seattle said, "Empowerment is educating one's self about rights and issues that go along with those rights so that we won't be in this limbo of 'What shall I do?'"

Parents want to be educated about the system, but little appears to have been done since 1986 when the superintendent of a large urban school district said, "Parents of Southeast Asian students need to learn about the American educational system, become knowledgeable about the different kinds of educational programs and services, and be cognizant of their rights and responsibilities as parents in the education of their children." That need still exists today.

Some important steps are being taken. At a recent meeting of Cambodian parents in Philadelphia, parents explored the meaning of assertiveness, and learned about parents' rights to request school information, and to have equal access and opportunity for the education of their children. Parents in Minnesota suggested that school districts have a local television show about school issues in the various languages of the students, such as Hmong, Vietnamese, and Cambodian. They also suggested that schools print school articles in the local newspapers of different language groups.

Parents want schools to meet them halfway. They want schools to require parents to pick up report cards and have teachers and tutors available to talk with them at that time. They want bilingual teachers to call parents in the evening and make home visits. More parents said they would attend meetings if schools provided transportation. Parents also believe that university teacher education programs should tell future teachers that all Asians are not the same, just as all Latinos are not the same.

At the same time that one teacher declared, "Parents have more power than they realize. I'm not paid for you to serve me," many parents complained about being used by teachers and schools to carry out their work requirements. In 1986, Sister Angela, an advocate for refugees in Providence, Rhode Island, criticized local schools and charity organizations for putting "token Southeast Asians on a board and then never asking them a question. They never ask the parents what their problems are. They are not listening. It's nice to have report cards translated into Cambodian and Hmong, but the poor parents can't even read Cambodian and Hmong. Have you ever had a simple meeting where you told parents what social studies is? What the value is of a child taking that subject?"

The goal of every school should be to have immigrant parents function as full partners in schoolwide decision-making processes. However, placing parents on schoolwide decision-making boards with little or no preparation to fulfill their roles is not likely to achieve that goal. Hampered by language barriers or lacking an understanding of how U.S. schools function, parents may feel discouraged or marginalized, and find themselves with only token roles.

To avoid this dilemma, school-based or districtwide parent advisory boards or other groups, such as an Asian parent/teacher/student organization, may provide positive settings in which Asian immigrant parents can learn more about how U.S. schools function and develop stronger leadership skills. There is a danger inherent in this approach as well. Unless the school or school district develops a plan for moving immigrant parents out of immigrant-only settings into mainstream parent groups, they may remain in such settings indefinitely. When this happens, immigrant parents are virtually "tracked"—experiencing exclusion from the full life of the school in a way that parallels the experience of school children placed in long-term, low expectation, academic "tracks."

The National Asian Family/School Partnership Project has identified a variety of strategies used by some schools to prevent marginalization of Asian immigrant parents. The Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California at Berkeley conducts annual conferences for Mien and Hmong parents in Redding, California entitled "What is Education?" These conferences are highly successful in a number of ways. Because day care is provided, many parents are able to attend, including mothers with small children. At the conferences, university staff shares ethnographic research and observations of school districts, homes, and classrooms. Members of the community speak. Even though conferences are held on Saturdays, most teachers and administrators attend. They learn a lot about their students' families by listening to the questions of the parents. Encouraged by these conferences, several young people have gone on to earn national reputations as advocates for education in their communities.

Homework is a simple way to involve parents in the education of their children, but many immigrant parents have never had homework themselves. It may be necessary to explain what homework is, why it is assigned, and what parents can do to help their children complete the work, regardless of its content and even if parents have had no formal education themselves. This can be accomplished in a letter, but it should not be the first letter sent home. The first letter should be a greeting, asking nothing of the parents, just inviting them to contact the school or visit the teacher. The vocabulary of a subsequent letter about homework should be simple but respectful of parents' intelligence. A modified version of a letter suggested by J. Chrispeels, M. Boruta, and M. Daugherty in *Communicating with Parents* (San Diego,CA: San Diego County Office of Education, 1988) is shown below.

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Students who finish their homework and hand it in on time learn important skills. They increase their self-confidence and they like school more. We want to give you some suggestions for helping your child with homework.

- Help your child choose a time and place to study every day. The place should be neat, reasonably quiet, and have good lighting.
- Ask your child about his or her homework. Say positive things about your child doing his or her homework.
- Make suggestions in a positive way, i.e., "The teacher will understand your ideas better if your writing is easy to read."
- Help your child, but do not do the work. If your child does not understand something, help him or her to write a question for the teacher.
- Call the teacher if the homework is unclear or your child does not understand something. Do not fight about homework.
- Help your child get make-up work if he or she is absent. Call the school and leave a message for the teacher asking for make-up work.
- Check your child's homework to see if it is neat and complete. Ask your child to explain some of it to you. If possible, check to see if it is right.

Thank you for your help. We hope you will give us your ideas on how to make homework better.

Sincerely,

After the letter has been mailed, a paraprofessional who speaks the parents' home language should make a telephone call to the parents to ensure they understand the letter. The phone call might also serve to invite parents to a meeting about homework. The letter, the phone call, and the meeting can help to establish positive contact between parents and the school.

Asian American parents often feel caught between their homeland culture and the dominant U.S. culture as they seek to help their children with school work. On one hand, Asian American parents who do not immediately respond to requests from public school staff to engage in standard parent outreach events are often regarded by school staff as not caring about their children. On the other hand, parents who ask teachers for help in solving learning problems experienced by Asian American children are frequently frustrated when teachers hand the responsibility for providing such help back to the parents. For many reasons, immigrant parents may feel inadequate to the task to instructing their children. Asian American parents who overcome their discomfort with the school system and the English language may still be expected to help children complete homework involving unfamiliar content and concepts.

When schools ask parents to help their children learn, they should be aware of the expertise that individual parents can bring to that effort. For example, not all Asian immigrant parents can read to their children in English, but many can read to their children in the family's first language, or can contribute by telling stories, limiting television, and providing the child with a quiet place and adequate time to complete homework. School staff can support the self-esteem of these parents by explicitly acknowledging that teachers must work with the families in order to educate a child.

PLANNING SCHOOL MEETINGS

Asian American parents from Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos may be particularly resistant to the notion of attending large public meetings organized by schools. This resistance is well grounded in their national history, for such meetings were usually where political "re-education" occurred in their homelands. Parents may have been forced to attend meetings after working in the fields for 12 hours or longer with the primary purpose of criticizing their level of effort. This criticism, in turn, often led to physical punishment. These memories may be called to mind by evening parent meetings dominated by school staff who focus on negative issues.

When school staff plan meetings for immigrant parents without reflecting on whether their underlying assumptions are appropriate, problems are created that undercut success. To make meetings more accessible and comfortable for parents not educated in the U.S. or who do not speak English well, school staff should:

- Plan the meeting with the help of community-based organizations, giving assignments to all volunteers, community workers, staff, and teachers.
- Work with CBOs to select meeting topics.
- Select meeting facilitators who are parents, who feel comfortable communicating in the primary languages of immigrant parents, who can identify with the concerns of parents in the audience, and who can demonstrate the strength of the parents' existing cultural knowledge in a school setting.

- Ensure that the tone of the meeting is friendly and non-threatening, that information is shared rather than taught or preached, and that presentations are courteous and not intimidating.
- Hold the meeting at a local library or other non-threatening place; if the meeting is held at school, make the entry way and meeting room as inviting as possible with flowers and children's art work.
- Include a special element, such as asking someone who is well known or respected to speak—an author of children's books, a doctor in child development, or some respected person from the community—or hold a parent appreciation ceremony and lunch immediately following the meeting.
- Send out nice invitations in the parents' primary language, perhaps made by their children.
- Follow up the invitation with a phone call in the parents' primary language to encourage attendance.
- Organize a car pool for those who do not drive.
- Provide child care that is interesting to both younger and older children.
- Provide a professional translator for every language group.
- Offer parents something to take away from the meeting—a school newsletter, a parent handbook, or pens or note paper donated by a local business.
- Pause longer than usual during the meeting to allow parents a chance to speak whose cultural norm for showing respect dictate periods of silence.
- Break the audience up into small participatory groups to elicit views and concerns.
- End the meeting with the formation of smaller groups that will continue to meet, and schedule those smaller meetings.

Failure to provide translators at school meetings is one of the most common complaints of immigrant parents. Parents in Des Moines suggested that schools provide a United Nations style service using ear phones and simultaneous translation in several languages. Short of this, paid interpreters at all meetings are essential. While it is often assumed that bilingual school staff will attend meetings in their free time and provide translation services, they should not be imposed upon to extend their work day without pay.

Even more important to parents than language, however, is the feeling that they belong in the school. A Cambodian elementary teacher in Chicago suggested, "Have the parents come to the planning meetings. Make the parents important people. Invite them to come share their experiences, not just come to learn. We should not make them look bad or tell them how to be good parents. Instead, we should ask them to come to share with us what they know about their children, share how they can help us with issues. Have gifts for them like pens or folders with information they can take home. Treat them as important participants at a conference or business meeting." In Minnesota, a community leader said, "To create true community/school partnerships, new models of shared power and decision-making will need to be explored."

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

The role of community-based organizations in orchestrating meetings between school personnel and parents cannot be underestimated. If schools are to collaborate with community-based organizations in true partnerships, the school principal will have to schedule meetings with CBO directors and arrange for a committee of school staff to meet with members of the CBO staff on a regular basis. Collaboration may also mean that the school district will contract with the CBO for provision of certain services, such as translators, child care, and making phone calls in the parents' primary language. In large urban areas, school districts may find it necessary to collaborate with several different organizations representing many different constituencies. School staff should recognize that collaboration does not mean the school abdicates its responsibilities, thereby making the CBO responsible for success or failure of the relationship.

In Philadelphia, Asian parents organized a Parents' Night, inviting other parents and the school to participate. According to the director of a local CBO, "This changed the roles so that parents went there as organizers rather than as participants." In another school district, a Filipino community-based organization encouraged parents to come to the first meeting by inviting a Filipino psychologist to talk about how their home culture affects the education of their children. Another meeting focused on educational rights in the United States.

In a migratory farm workers' community in California, the school district encouraged parents to come to a meeting with the promise of meeting an author of children's books written in Spanish. The meetings were held in the community library to introduce parents to the public library and to mitigate negative attitudes toward school by parents with unhappy educational experiences during their own childhoods.

One CBO suggested the following guidelines for school/parent meetings:

- Meetings between schools and families must be a continuing process because culture is not static; we have to keep re-understanding each other.
- Family meetings are where people should come as equals.
- Schools and families need time and space for interaction, not only in the case of emergencies.
- There is a key role for bicultural mentors to play for young people.
- There is a need for cultural brokers who can build bridges and make meaningful contact with both children and parents whose experiences might be extremely different.
- Schools and parents ought to set up joint parent/child activities
- Families should be engaged in making the curriculum.

School staff may have to adapt to higher levels of noise at meetings for parents who do not speak English as a first language. This results, in part, from the resounding noise of translations, repetitions, and private conversations. Additionally, different cultures allow for a variety of behavior in a public meeting. Children frequently attend these meetings with their parents. A child-care program in the same building will reduce the number of children in the meeting, but parents must feel comfortable bringing their babies and children into the meeting or they will not come.

WORKING TOGETHER

Laying aside assumptions about traditional norms of behavior does not come easily to most people. But only by working together on a regular basis can school personnel, parents, and young people break down barriers of class, race, and nationalism to realize Dewey's vision of democracy. During the greatest period of immigration to the United States, Dewey perceived democracy as more than a form of regulation and control. He saw it as a way of living together under the rubric of shared interests. For Dewey, education was crucial to enable participants to understand the importance of each individual's contribution to this endeavor. This is no less true for those who have come to the United States recently. What is different is the increased opportunity for parents and schools to work together.

Community-based organizations can facilitate this for parents who do not share the same cultural or linguistic background as the teachers. CBOs can also help parents and schools organize meetings and ensure genuine participation by parents. For this to happen, differences in language and cultural behavior have to be considered. Parents need to learn how to listen to their children. School staff need to learn how to listen to parents. A deficit theory of parent participation has no value when it comes to eliciting the knowledge and strength of the home cultures of children. Tokenism and marginalization are not participation. The needs of the children of Asian immigrants must be identified and addressed. This can only be accomplished when schools, parents, and communities work together.

APPENDIX

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Minneapolis Public Schools
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Hmong PTSO
P.O. Box 7496, Minneapolis, MN 55407
Tel: 612-827-5061

Hmong American Partnership
450 N. Syndicate, Suite 35, St. Paul, MN 55104
Tel: 612-642-9601

PHILADELPHIA, PA

Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia
5412 N. 5th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19120
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Lowell Elementary School
5th Street and Nedro Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19120
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Cambodian Association of Illinois
1105 W. Lawrence, Suite 201, Chicago, IL 60640
Tel: 312-878-7090

Vietnamese Association of IL
4824 N. Broadway, Chicago, IL 60640
Tel: 312-278-7300

Theodore Roosevelt High School
3436 W. Wilson Avenue, Chicago, IL 60625
Tel: 312-534-5000

McCutcheon Elementary School
4865 North Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL 60640
Tel: 312-534-2680

DES MOINES, IA

Des Moines Public Schools
1800 Grand Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50309
Tel: 515-242-7781

Harding Middle School
203 East Euclid Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50317
Tel: 515-244-9189

North High School
501 Holcomb Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50313
Tel: 515-242-7200

Society of Thaidam-American Friendship (SOTAF)
1409 Clark Street, Des Moines, IA 50314
Tel: 515-246-9736

Adams Elementary School
3720 E. 29th Street, Des Moines, IA 50317
Tel: 515-266-5169

SEATTLE, WA

Cleveland High School
5511 15th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98108

Ingraham High School
1819 North 135th Street, Seattle, WA 98133

Filipino Youth Activities, Inc.
810 18th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98122
Tel: 206-461-4870

SAN DIEGO, CA

Horton Elementary School
5050 Guymon Street, San Diego, CA 92102
Tel: 619-264-0171

Wilson Middle School
3838 Orange Avenue, San Diego, CA 92105
Tel: 619-280-1661

Lao PTA
3912 Myrthly Avenue, San Diego, CA 92105

Lao Community Cultural Center
429 Radio Drive, San Diego, CA 92114

Lanexang Student Association of San Diego
6101 Benson Avenue, San Diego, CA 92106

NATIONAL COALITION OF ADVOCATES FOR STUDENTS (NCAS)

NCAS began in 1975 as a voluntary network of education advocates concerned about rising suspension and expulsion rates in public schools. Since then, NCAS has grown into a national advocacy organization with 21 member groups in 13 states and the District of Columbia.

NCAS works to achieve equal access to a quality public education for vulnerable students, particularly those who are poor, children of color, recently immigrated, or differently abled.

No other national coalition works full-time on public school issues from the perspective of meeting the needs of students who are not well served by the public schools.

Focusing on kindergarten through grade 12, NCAS informs and mobilizes citizens and policymakers to help resolve critical education issues. Utilizing national projects and studies, public hearings and outreach through publications and the news media, NCAS raises concerns that might otherwise not be heard.

NCAS believes fundamental structural changes are needed within schools and school systems. When a significant percentage of students fail academically or leave school before graduation, NCAS holds the school accountable. Because some schools serve all of their students well, the coalition believes that all schools can do so. Accordingly, NCAS seeks stronger governance roles for parents, who, in turn, press for needed changes in school policy and practice.

OTHER NCAS NATIONAL PROJECTS

Mobilization for Equity is a five-year project launched in 1995 to build public will to remedy the equity failures of recent federal, state, and local school reforms. The project aims to encourage policy outcomes and changes in school practice to actualize key student rights to help ensure educational equity for all students.

The Clearinghouse for Immigrant Education (CHIME) is an interactive clearinghouse and networking service that facilitates access to educational materials, organizations, and people concerned with the effective education of immigrant students. CHIME staff survey available resources, help callers to make networking connections, and provide advice in response to specific requests. CHIME can be reached via its toll-free number, **1-800-441-7192.**

The Good Common School Project addresses the need for fundamental school reform. The project publication, *The Good Common School: Making the Vision Work for All Children*, defines 10 critical student entitlements that will make schools more responsive to the needs of all students. By blending a vision of fairer schools with a critique of current education research and school policies and practices, the Good Common School Project offers parents, educators, and advocates a comprehensive guide to advocacy-driven reform.

Viviremos is a bilingual HIV/AIDS prevention project working to help targeted teen populations—migrant farmworkers, immigrants, and Latino youth—learn how to protect themselves from HIV infection. Viviremos publications include *Criteria for Evaluating an AIDS Curriculum, Guidelines for HIV & AIDS Student Support Services*, a bilingual AIDS curriculum *¡Viviremos! On the Road to Healthy Living/El Camino Hacia la Salud, Steps to Help Your School Set Up an AIDS Education Program* published in English and Spanish, and *Cultivating Health: An Agenda for Adolescent Farmworkers*.

School Counseling in Today's Real World. Due to rapidly changing demographics in the United States, public school counselors are being challenged to respond to the urgent needs of U.S.- and foreign-born minority students and their parents. This project seeks to increase access for racial, ethnic, and language minority public school students to appropriate guidance and counseling services by developing the capacity to train school counselors to deliver quality services to minority students and their families in a cross-culturally competent manner.

School Voucher Project. The complexity of the school vouchers debate requires parents to have full access to comprehensive information about how this form of school choice is likely to affect their children and the educational prospects of entire communities. This project supports parents and community-based organizations in Cleveland and Milwaukee as they educate themselves about school vouchers. Project activities emphasize the connection between school vouchers and securing quality education for all students, especially those from impoverished communities and students of color.

Many NCAS services to public schools that serve immigrant children are free. NCAS also offers on-site needs assessment, consultation, and training to diverse public schools at reasonable cost. Most technical assistance services to community-based organizations are free. For more information, call Joan First, (617) 357-8507.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS FROM NCAS

From NCAS:

(All prices include shipping and handling)

Achieving the Dream: How Communities and Schools Can Improve Education for Immigrant Students (1993). 95 pp. $10.00. This manual is designed to help community organizations, concerned educators, and parents as they work to improve local public schools on behalf of immigrant students. Each chapter focuses on central elements of quality schooling from the perspective of the young immigrant.

Delivering on the Promise: Positive Practices for Immigrant Students (1994). 188pp., $18.95. Inspired by the challenges facing immigrant students in U.S. public schools, this book documents promising collaborative efforts by educators, families, and communities in schools across the country as they work to support school success for young newcomers.

Immigrant Students: Their Legal Right of Access to Public Schools (Revised in 1992). 55pp., $10.00. A practical manual for advocates, school administrators, and educators that reviews education and legal rights of undocumented students and their families. Includes sample letters to immigrant parents and sample school policies.

Looking for America, Vol I: Promising School-Based Practices in Intergroup Relations (1994). 156 pp., $16.95.

Looking for America, Vol II: Seven Schools Experimenting with Intergroup Relations (1995). 115 pp., $16.95.

These timely publications are guides for educators, advocates, and parents seeking to chart a positive, productive path through the complicated terrain of intergroup relations in U.S. public schools. Both volumes illustrate how encounters between newcomers and established residents can be both difficult and exciting. (Volumes I and II may be purchased together for $29.95.)

New Voices: Immigrant Students in U.S. Public Schools (1988). 176 pp., $16.95. The final report of NCAS's two-year Immigrant Student Project is the first national examination of the experiences of young immigrants as they encounter U.S. public schools. After documenting the many problems faced by young newcomers, the book offers detailed recommendations on how schools can respond to growing student diversity.

From California Tomorrow:

(To order, contact California Tomorrow, Fort Mason Center, Building B, San Francisco, CA 94123; 415-441-7635):

Bridges: Promising Programs for the Education of Immigrant Children (1989). 174 pp., $17.00. This tool for community educators and activists contains 75 replicable working models of successful public schools with multicultural and multilingual student populations.

Crossing the Schoolhouse Border: Immigrant Students and the California Public Schools (1988). 132 pp., $16.00. A report on the experiences of immigrant children in the California public schools. Topics include issues facing school districts and directions for change that focus on policy, programs, and community advocacy.

Embracing Diversity: Teachers' Voices from California's Classrooms (1990). 115 pp., $17.00. Meet 36 California teachers doing remarkable work in mainstream classrooms with students from diverse cultural, national, and linguistic backgrounds. Through in-depth interviews, the educators share their strategies to inspire their students to bridge gaps of language and culture.

The Unfinished Journey: Restructuring Schools in a Diverse Society (1994). 360 pp., $27.00. A report on school restructuring and reform in California, one of the most active school reform movements in the nation. This book tells the story of teachers, school principals, parents, and communities who dare to invent new ways of schooling.

Member Organizations

Advocates for Children of New York
105 Court Street, 4th Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families
931 Donaghey Building, Little Rock, AR 72201

ASPIRA, Inc.
1444 Eye Street, N.W., 8th Floor, Washington, DC 20036

California Tomorrow
Fort Mason Center, Building B, San Francisco, CA 94123-1380

Center for Law and Education
1875 Connecticut Ave., N.W. ,Suite 510, Washington, DC 20009

Children's Defense Fund
25 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001

Coalition for Quality Education
1702 Upton Avenue, Toledo, OH 43607

Designs for Change
6 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60602

Education Law Center
155 Washington Street, Newark, NJ 07102

The Education Law Center/PA
801 Arch Street, Suite 610, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Intercultural Development Research Association
5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350, San Antonio, TX 78228-1125

Kentucky Youth Advocates
624 Shelby Street, Frankfort, KY 40601

Massachusetts Advocacy Center
100 Boylston Street, 2nd Floor, Boston, MA 02116

Mississippi Human Services
P.O. Box 1684, Jackson, MS 39205-1684

Multicultural Education, Training & Advocacy
240-A Elm Street, Suite 22, Somerville, MA 02144

National Council of La Raza
1111 19th Street N.W., Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20036

North Carolina Education and Law Project
P.O. Box 27343, Raleigh, NC 27601

Parents Union for Public Schools
311 S. Juniper Street, Suite 602, Philadelphia, PA 19107

SPAN
35 Halsey Street, 4th floor, Newark, NJ 07102

Statewide Youth Advocates, Inc.
17 Elk Street, Albany, NY 12207-1002

Student Advocacy Center
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